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SKETCHES

OF

AUSTRALIAN LIFE AND SCENERY.

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BY

ONE WHO HAS BEEN A RESIDENT FOR THIRTY YEARS.

SECOND EDITION.

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London:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,
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LONDON:
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TO THE PUBLISHERS.

DEAR SIRS,

YOU ask me to write a Preface for the forthcoming "Sketches of Australian Life and Scenery;" and, for several reasons, it would afford me much pleasure to comply with your request. You have, however, been aware, ever since I placed the manuscript in your hands for publication, that the Author was desirous to publish *anonymously;* and to write a Preface in my own name would effectually defeat his wishes.

The mode of my introduction to you would, I think, sufficiently satisfy you that the readers of these "Sketches of Australian Life and Scenery" may rely upon my assurance that "although the *names* are *fictitious*, the *scenes* and *facts* may be relied upon as correct, with no more variations than the few sentences required to connect the various incidents."

Having kept up a correspondence with the Author, during the long period of his residence in the colony of Victoria, I can, on my own knowledge, vouch for a continuous history, by letter, of the steady yet rapid growth of that colony in population, wealth, and civilization; confirmed also by newspapers and printed statistics. The descriptions of Australian scenery have been made familiar to me by letter; and many of the incidents have been recorded to me in letters written immediately, or very shortly after their occurrence.

If this short certificate of my knowledge of the Author and his work will sufficiently comply with your request for a "Preface," I willingly send it to you; and subscribe myself, dear Sirs,

Your faithful servant,

The English Correspondent of
the Author of "Sketches of
Australian Life & Scenery."

December 24th, 1875.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Explanations.—Some of our passengers.—The skipper . . 1

CHAPTER II.

Melbourne.—Settling down.—Thomas.—Life or death?—An invitation.—Off to the bush.—A rough ride.—Bush scenery . 9

CHAPTER III.

A "boomer."—A change in the programme.—Sighting the enemy.—Pursuer pursued 25

CHAPTER IV.

Bush yarns.—A black funeral.—Home again 35

CHAPTER V.

Our charioteer.—Idealizing and idolizing.—Hopes and fears.—Jilted 42

CHAPTER VI.

Real friends.—Honour bright.—Lady helps.—The first gold.—Full price for any amount!—A digger's wedding.—The gold fever.—Death busy.—The "Nelson" case 53

CHAPTER VII.

Changes.—Sinking funds.—An agitated parting.—Bush-ranging as a tonic for the nerves.—On the track to Teb-Teb.—Mountain scenery.—Then.—Now 72

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

Evening at the diggings.—Camp life.—"Died like a dog."—A good Samaritan.—"The first who moves I shoot dead!"—Sumptuously lodged.—Wattie again.—"Feast time" and "fast time."—A consultation with Nero. 88

CHAPTER IX.

Wattie's story.—Reminiscences.—My factotum.—The palmy days of Mial rush.—No one thought of danger.—Flash Jack.—Janet 106

CHAPTER X.

Something out of my groove.—New responsibilities.—"*Twa* young mistresses?"—"The little un's worse to-night, doctor."—John Chinaman.—"Don't spend the siller for them that's nothing to you" 120

CHAPTER XI.

Melbourne.—Antediluvian memories.—*Après moi le Déluge.*—Is the voice a natural expression of identity?—At the levée.—Our colonial aristocracy.—In the cemetery.—A cosmopolitan burial-ground 132

CHAPTER XII.

A brother practitioner.—Sunday in Melbourne.—My sisters.—Turn and turn about.—Getting acquainted.—Dr. and Mrs. Wyse.—Just the place for the young ladies 149

CHAPTER XIII.

Ballarat.—Deep mining.—"Whose is all this land?"—Janet's reception.—Pros and cons 164

CHAPTER XIV.

Free selectors.—The land sham.—Tara's Hall.—How gold is got.—Nor even a ghost.—There is always the chance of a find 174

CHAPTER XV.

PAGE
Nature at work again.—Deserted diggings.—Margaret and Helen.—A pertinacious little thing.—Confessions.—A new start 187

CHAPTER XVI.

Our journey to Lakeville.—Are we lost?—"Jumbled-up" country.—An old friend.—New friends.—More blanks than prizes in matrimony.—A lawn party in the bush.—Colonial society.—Young Australia 198

CHAPTER XVII.

An Australian village.—An Australian landscape . . . 216

CHAPTER XVIII.

A visit to the craters.—The hill of fire.—Envious genii.—Edward Elton.—A bush giant-killer.—Pat at home.—The land gets no rest.—Ecclesiastical matters.—A colonial parish.—Black police and coloured police 220

CHAPTER XIX.

An emu hunt.—A moonlight ride.—A victim.—"A marciful warning."—A good walk 241

CHAPTER XX.

A complicated landscape.—Doctors at a discount.—Parish interests.—Church and dissent.—Hummock glades.—Margaret 252

CHAPTER XXI.

An explanation.—A little sparring.—Welcome visitors.—Jessie.—In Melbourne.—Our Queen's son.—"Don't you count?" Meetings and greetings.—"There's nought about gentlemen in the Bible."—Hopes and plans 265

CHAPTER XXII.

The Boys 287

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAGE
A kangaroo battue.—Too late!—Just in time! . . . 291

CHAPTER XXIV.

Our parson.—Sheep-washing in the old way.—"Not enough to keep a fellow in 'baccy."—Swag-men.—Hidden fires and bush fires.—Fire-worship.—Christmas in the colonies.—The bush on fire!—A race for life.—A scene of desolation . . . 298

CHAPTER XXV.

A sad ending to the holidays.—An anxious time . . . 318

CHAPTER XXVI.

No hope.—"There will soon be an end."—Friends and no friends.—A gleam of consciousness.—The end . . . 322

CHAPTER XXVII.

Soporific.—"Quite the gentleman—on Sundays!"—Sweet Folly. 332

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The wedding.—My fiftieth birthday!—Master Jack's epistle . 338

SKETCHES

OF

AUSTRALIAN LIFE AND SCENERY.

CHAPTER I.

Explanations.—Some of our passengers.—The skipper.

ASSOCIATION is an odd thing; "striking the electric chain wherewith we're darkly bound," says Byron. I don't know about "*darkly*," but certainly *strangely*.

Here am I, twenty years in this colony. Twenty years a wanderer; twenty years silent to my old friends—the readers of British magazine literature. During that time I've scarcely thought of them—never felt a wish to woo their sweet favour. Once, indeed, a fugitive paper of mine, detailing an incident which occurred during my voyage out, found its way into print, and somebody sent me a five-pound note for it; but it came at a time when I was ready to forswear England and everything English.

To-day an irresistible impulse prompts me to speak out and tell of the motley characters, strange incidents, and changing circumstances which make up the episode of colonial life.

I wish, at the outset, to state that this writing *is* strictly what it professes to be—simple *sketches* of Australian life and scenery. I make no pretension to the

power of delineating character, still less to the philosophical impartiality of the historian.

I suppose, indeed, that the *writer's* character will show itself as his story progresses, and that, as his story is connected with some striking events in the history of his adopted country, her public life must necessarily be alluded to. My main object, however, is to record the impressions left on my mind by the different phases of social life in which I have mixed, and to convey some idea of common every-day life in the Bush districts, accompanied by descriptions of the character of the country and its scenery. Let it be borne in mind that every incident here related is strictly true. Liberties will be occasionally taken with time and place; names of persons must of course be suppressed; and where the area is limited, names of places will, for obvious reasons, be altered. Events will sometimes be brought together which in reality happened at more distant intervals and at more remote distances; but all really happened, and that within my own personal knowledge.

They illustrate a phase of life which is fast passing away before the influence of increasing population and greater facilities of intercourse between all parts of the colony.

Geography is not my strong point, and we haven't many atlases on the diggings. I hope I'm correct in saying that there is no country left in the world wherein could be re-enacted the scenes and circumstances which occurred in the early days of Victoria, or Port Phillip, as she was then called. I do not refer to the discovery of the gold-fields only, but rather to the peculiar conditions amid which that discovery was made. These were—the number of places in which the precious metal was found almost simultaneously; the paucity of the population at that period, and the consequent dearth of food and house ac-

commodation; the inaccessible forest ranges, in which most of the auriferous country was situated; the enormous distance, then unbridged by steamers, which separated us from the great centres of civilization; and our close proximity to a large criminal class.

Such a combination of circumstances is unique. Doubtless all this is related in histories of these colonies, of which I suppose there are plenty—though, I regret to say, our public history is not yet taught in our schools. I am an ignoramus myself, and have never come across a history of Victoria. History, however, often fails to convey a fair conception of a people's domestic and social life. A slight sketch by an actor in that life will frequently leave a more correct impression of it.

Most of the actors at the time of which I write were themselves too deeply engrossed and had too heavy a stake in what was passing around them to give much attention to the strangeness of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Standing aside, as I did, from the hurry of affairs, or mixing in them mechanically, without hope of gain or fear of loss, my mind was plastic to receive and to retain the impress of the time. I did not recognize this *then;* but since, during my solitary life on the diggings, I have felt that it was so.

Dreaming during long smokes, and musing during longer rides, the past often recurs to my memory. The idea has grown on me that it is a past which this generation, at least, will scarcely see again.

Though I never exactly faced the notion of clearing the dust from memory, and making a raid on brain cobwebs, still I suppose the thought must have been silently growing within, and, now that the impetus has come, like a garrulous veteran, I am eager to discourse of the good old days. "But what is the impetus?" you will say. It's just

this. I have had news from the old country—news that has worked me off the moorings of indolence, stirred up the dust, and sent the cobwebs fluttering in mid-air—news that has touched some latent link in the chain of bygone associations. I cannot tell *how* or *where* the link of to-day joins itself to the broken chain of my far-off youth. I can only feel how strange a thing is mental association, or latent cerebral action, if that be its true name.

Why a letter, threatening me with the guardianship and custody of two English-reared girls, should incite me to commence this writing I don't know, unless indeed it be a presentiment of the utter disturbance my hitherto free-and-easy life must undergo. No more comfortable unpunctuality! No more pleasant bachelor ways, which have become as second nature to me! Let me, at least while I can, revel in the past; perhaps I may find courage to face my new future.

How well I remember my last look at Old England! Leaning against the bulwarks of the ship, I strained my eyes for their last look of home.

"When shall I see it again?" thought I. "Ah! who knows the how or the when? After all there is something that binds one to one's native land!"

Sentiment was getting the upper hand when a bluff voice recalled me to stern reality.

"Are you the doctor?" Something in my face, as I turned, signified the affirmative, for he continued, "Then you're wanted below; here's Mrs. Sloan in hysterics and awful ill, and how *am* I to keep the children quiet?"

Soon I was between decks among the emigrants under my charge. A curious scene it was. Some laughing, others weeping; some steadily completing preparations, others lying, half dead, in their bunks; above all, the pitiful wail of children. It was touching to see how some of the men bore up, cheering their wives, quieting their children,

or sturdily striving to keep their legs as they made their way from the galley with hot water or food.

Among the women, too, were some not to be outdone in silent heroism. As Sloan attended to his noisy wife, I observed a woman in the opposite cabin. Two children clung to her skirts. She had stilled their crying with a biscuit. Now she bent sorrowfully over the babe at her breast—her cheek pale, her lips quivering. The husband sat on the bench at the long table just opposite, his face resting on his hands—a sullen, disappointed man, whose fierce eyes looked out from heavy overhanging brows, following the movements around him with that abstracted gaze which tells of thought fixed on the past, or anticipating the future.

I wonder whether that man has become a bush-ranger or a Member of Parliament? He did not settle in Victoria, so I lost sight of him very soon after our arrival; but I have often thought he had *that* in him which, if he were successful, would constitute him a leader among his fellows, and if unsuccessful, a restless desperado.

In either case I fancy his meek little wife would be of small account in his life.

Two young girls occupied the cabin next to hers. In this vessel the unmarried women were berthed between the cabins of the married, who were supposed to exercise some sort of supervision over them. These girls were sisters, alone in the world, and strongly attached to each other, but with dispositions as opposite as was the lot to which both were unwittingly hastening. At this time their occupations were characteristic. Hester, who had already made friends with one of the boys, and coaxed him to bring her some water, was busily scrubbing the floor of the cabin. Polly sat up on her berth motionless, her face pressed against the small port-hole, watching the waves as they beat against the ship's side.

Poor girl! little did she think how soon she would lie beneath them. From the beginning of the voyage she drooped, and one still, bright evening in the tropics, a little company gathered round the gangway, the captain's rough voice rose in the clear calm air, repeating the touching prayers for a burial at sea. A moment's hush —a sudden splash—and the blue waves closed again!

For a day or two we thought of Polly, and her intimates went about with a subdued air; but soon life on board resumed its usual aspect. These things are quickly forgotten at sea. The busy sister changed her berth, and might often be seen surreptitiously flirting between decks, or joking with the sailors; but she still remembered Polly. A year after, in the height of the gold fever, passing the door of one of the Melbourne hotels, I saw Hester handing nobblers across the bar counter—her cheery voice giving and taking banter and joke.

I stopped a moment at the door; she looked up; her eyes filled as they met mine.

I knew she thought of Polly lying white and still in the little cabin, and of the dull, low splash on that brilliant tropical night.

But I have wandered far from the day on which we sailed. I shall not linger over the circumstances of our voyage; it was like most others, which have been described many times. One curious episode that occurred has been already published.

I was a good deal alone during the earlier part, and found ship-life very monotonous. The officers took their cue from our worthy skipper, and he held me in slight esteem, as a poor-spirited landlubber. It was not until we were half across that he discovered I was not quite such a milksop as he had supposed. His original opinion of me was the result of the untoward accidents of our first Sunday at sea.

He had been afloat from his boyhood, chiefly in the China trade, and had never before had charge of emigrants. Having by ill-luck (as he said) lighted on them, he was as anxious to do his duty by them as by his vessel. Thoroughly at home in handling the latter, he proposed to manage the former in equally shipshape fashion. "Tender handling," "strict discipline," was his motto. He loved his ship, and could not have endured to see her battered, dirty, or roughly used; *but* she must obey the helm, and answer to the strain on her canvas. So with his passengers. They were to be cared for, comforted, tended; but discipline must be maintained, and every call of public duty punctually obeyed.

It was Tuesday when we sailed. Our skipper considered he had made a large concession to land-nurtured weakness in surrendering the remainder of that week to sickness and disorder.

In most cases it would, in truth, have been sufficient; but on that unlucky Sunday morning we came on to the tail-swell of a previous gale, which set the ship rolling most dismally.

However, it was calm, and fine overhead. It was Sunday. Discipline required that it should be observed. How was that mass of human beings to be managed if we began by shirking the public call of Duty? Accordingly, notice was given that prayers would be read at the poop at seven bells, and that all not occupied in necessary work were expected to attend.

The capstan was draped with a flag, the book secured on it. The crew appeared in clean duff-day clothes; and a good number of the emigrants mustered, chiefly single women and men, anxious to escape the closeness below. Many looked queer, and yet more queer, as the ship continued to lurch heavily, and found it necessary to hold on.

Punctually as seven bells struck, the captain took his

place, and, baring his head, commenced the service—the women sitting mostly on the floor of the deck, holding to the skylights or hencoops.

I steadied myself against the mizenmast—the great spanker-boom groaning and creaking as it swung to and fro with the swell.

The skipper "sang out" a couple of the opening verses in a cheery, encouraging voice, and commenced the exhortation,—

"Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in—" . . . "Hold on, Mrs. Sloane!" he shouted, as that lady incontinently slipped headlong towards the companion-ladder. She was assisted below, and the exhortation proceeded swimmingly a few lines further. "Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as—" . . . "Fetch the bucket, George!" again shouted the reader, in anything but a reverent tone, as poor Polly staggered to the ship's side.

She being accommodated, and the vessel righting from a tremendous lurch, our zealous captain proceeded undauntedly to the end of the Lord's Prayer, triumphantly giving the "Gloria Patri" at its close.

A dead pause—then, *impatiently*, "Why don't you make the responses, doctor?"

I collapsed, and made a rush to the companion-way, forfeiting, on the instant, the worthy skipper's respect.

That was how it came about that the earlier part of the voyage was not so pleasant to me as it might have been. However, as I have said, we understood each other better before its close. I think, too, the honest sailor learned to estimate the nature, or the stomachs, of landsfolk better. At any rate, his passengers carried away with them a real esteem for his true kindliness of heart and sturdy sense of duty; and it was with a universal feeling of regret that we parted from him on our arrival in Port Phillip bay.

CHAPTER II.

Melbourne.—Settling down —Thomas.—Life or death?—An invitation. — Off to the bush. — A rough ride. — Bush scenery.

It was in the month of January that I got clear of the ship, landing from a small river steamer late one evening. I secured a bed at an inn, near where the wharf now stands. In those days it was a desert of dust, or sea of mud, according to the season, close to the Yarra.

I do not forget the astonishment with which I beheld my face in the glass next morning. It was covered with crimson blotches, of various sizes; one eye swollen and painful. I had not thought of mosquitoes when I decided to occupy a bedroom abutting on the river.

I did not venture out until dusk, when the chief thing that struck me in the appearance of the town was its extreme irregularity. Good houses and huts of wattle and dab stood side by side; tents were pitched in the main streets, in close proximity to shops of some pretension. On a hill, at one end of the town, was a particularly ugly English church; on the opposite hill a smaller one, whitewashed, and conventically devoid of ornament; between them, in the valley, a more ecclesiastical-looking Roman Catholic chapel, a brick meeting-house, a rather pretentious Scotch church, and a plain oblong building, the Jewish synagogue. These represented the religious opinions of the new colonists. I believe two or three

other chapels were hidden in what were at that time the outskirts; and preparations were making for building a handsomer English church in the then centre of Melbourne. The post-office was a dingy conglomeration of rooms, with windows opening on to a wooden verandah; the Mechanics' Institute, small, but creditable to so young a colony. These, with some Government buildings, constituted the leading features of Melbourne; but the streets were nobly laid out, and even then gave the place an air of empty grandeur, which, with the incongruity of the habitations, struck one as singular.

I had several letters of introduction, which, as usual, were of very little use. People were hospitable, and asked me to dinner; but I met with no one who could help me to an opening for the exercise of my profession. I had made sure of easily getting into practice, intended to settle steadily at it, and make my fortune rapidly. Week after week passed, and I could not even see my way to a commencement. So at last I took courage, and boldly knocked at the door of a well-known medical man, whom I had casually met in a druggist's shop a few days before. He looked surprised at my visit, but politely requested me to wait while he carefully laid aside some specimens he had been examining under a microscope. I knew something of Natural History—at least enough to talk about it—having been a member of a Microscopic Society at home; and was able to report to the doctor some curious observations which had come under our notice at one of the latest meetings I had attended.

Afterwards I showed him my credentials, and asked his opinion of my prospects, if I remained here.

"If you are steady and willing to work, remain; if you are unsteady and idle, return," said Dr. Lay concisely.

"Try me," I replied with equal brevity; "I shall stay."

"There is a very unpleasant and unhealthy part of the

town at the present moment in want of a resident medical man. It is out of my beat, but I have been obliged to go there a good deal lately. If you are inclined to settle there, I will give you a letter, which will smooth your way; but I tell you plainly, Collingwood Flat is a poor neighbourhood, and not an agreeable place of residence; lots of work and not much pay. Perhaps you'd rather go up country?"

"I'll try the Flat," I rejoined decisively. "Thank you for your kindness to a stranger."

"I don't think we shall be strangers long, lad," the doctor said, as I departed.

In three days I had secured a wooden hut (cottage we called it), and fixed up a plate on the outside of the little verandah, informing the world of the Flat of my name and attainments.

The weather was hot; water bad and scarce; vegetables and fruit nowhere. People lived on mutton. You could buy a good leg for sixpence. Men, women, and children ate mutton morning, noon, and night, washing it down with bad tea, or worse liquor. There was plenty of practice, especially among the children, among whom, in the early days of the colony, the mortality was enormous—mind I say the *early* days. I hope no one will imagine that this portion of the present writing applies to Melbourne as it now is. I have seen three phases of life in Victoria:—

The easy-going, comfortable times, when the squatters were kings, and used their wealth right royally.

The bustling days of wild excitement, when the diggers were kings, and used their wealth right madly.

The settled, prosperous times, when the banks and merchants are kings, and use their wealth right prudently.

It is of the first I am now speaking. Pleasant times they were. The squatters came down after shearing, and

remained in town over Christmas. You might see them congregated about the doors of the Old Club, then on the sunny side of Collins Street, in the centre of the town; or issuing from the stables at the "Prince of Wales" in wonderful vehicles, drawn by splendid horses.

Our few ladies would be on the *qui-vive;* it was the season of social gatherings. If a ship came in bringing news of a rise in wool, balls and picnics looked up. Pleasant and unceremonious they were, too! Old friends, separated by hundreds of miles of bush, met and compared notes of station progress, vying with each other in pithy sayings or smart anecdotes, letting off the social energy which had accumulated during the solitary winter months.

New chums were introduced, though not many, for these were times when the flagstaff on the Western Hill showed British bunting perhaps once in three months, signalizing a vessel from home. Great then would be the rush for news; eager the anxiety for letters. New arrivals, if hard up, might make a tolerable haul by selling copies of old newspapers, magazines, &c., for bush reading. I know a flourishing importer, who has now one of the largest warehouses in Melbourne, and *fêtes* his *employés* by the hundred, the foundation of whose business was laid by the sale of old newspapers and books so bought from immigrants.

A fresh face in Collins Street caused quite an excitement. We were all on the alert to learn the *who* and the *whence.* A strange girl at a ball, if she were pretty, created a *furore.* There were the newest fashions and latest style to interest her own sex, and, for ours, the lingering whiff of English air in conversation and manner.

Not that we were forgetful of old friends, or vulgarly inquisitive concerning new ones; instances of ill-bred curiosity were rare, but our sphere was necessarily

narrow, and we were naturally glad of any opportunity of enlarging it.

How we noticed everything! There was leisure in Collins Street then. People attended to their business in a quiet, methodical way; and perhaps the result was, individually, as satisfactory as in these times of bustle and excitement.

Professional calls usually brought Dr. Lay through the main thoroughfares once a day. His equipage was characteristic—sober, substantial, and convenient. The horse and coachman matched the equipage. Both knew their business, and went steadily at it. You never saw that horse wasting his strength in champing the bit, pawing the ground, or showing off in a general way, as medical horses may be observed to do nowadays. He was altogether above that. He had his work to do, and he did it.

The coachman was part of the horse. Every morning, punctually to the minute, he appeared in front of the doctor's house, seated on the box, in drab coat, gaiters, hat, and gloves to match. He never was known to move from his seat, or to recognize his intimates (if he had any), when on duty. There was a floating tradition that he slept on that box, in full official costume. That, however, I was able, from personal knowledge, to contradict; for one night, in an extreme case, I reluctantly disturbed that regular household, rousing Thomas first. From a window over the stable he looked out at me, in a red cotton nightcap, and certainly minus the drab coat—surprised also out of the silence which usually distinguished him. A good servant and faithful was Thomas, sharing, in his degree, his master's high sense of duty and patient usefulness. Both master and servant are gone now—peace to their memory! Surely they have found the recompense of unselfish benevolence and honest work!

At the time of which I am writing, the doctor and his belongings were in the heyday of usefulness—an institution in the place. One never imagined they had been young, or thought of their growing old. He enjoyed his quiet joke; his shrewd remarks showed a good deal of insight into character, and that power of appreciating the feelings, and even prejudices, of others common to men of broad views and quick sympathy.

It was generally understood that Dr. Lay was not to be called out at night except on emergencies. When I ventured to disturb him it was to bring him to a child who was very ill. The disease had suddenly taken a turn for the worse, and I felt I wanted my senior's experience both of the disease and the climate.

I was much struck by his consideration for the child's mother—a lady born and nurtured in the lap of English luxury—whose husband had met with severe losses at home. They had come to Victoria, hoping to retrieve their fortunes.

Mrs. Raine was of an excessively sensitive temperament. The anxiety she suffered during her boy's illness was extreme; yet it was touching to notice how bravely she bore up in her husband's presence, knowing that he reproached himself for having brought them here before the country was sufficiently settled to produce articles of food suitable to the climate. How she nursed that boy day and night, stilling her trembling heart, steadying her shaking hand, lest the father should feel the one or the child the other. Even then I was not much given to prayer; but I was young, and my youthful warmth of feeling had not yet been turned to gall. I prayed for that woman. It seemed as if the mother's great love—her great need—brought all associated with it very near the spiritual world. I felt as if her heart must be something like the Great Father's heart, and instinctively

asked Him to look into it and grant its anguished desire. The child's life swayed in the balance. Sometimes we thought death had won; at others a returning ebb of life would reawaken hope. Dr. Lay did all he could; I had done the same. The crisis was at hand. It was a burning day; the wind roared beneath the eaves of the verandah, shaking the iron roofing, causing the windows to rattle, drying up every atom of moisture in the air, filling each aperture with powdered dust. There was no yan-yean then to water the streets; no pavement to come between door-step and dusty roadway. Heaps accumulated at the threshold and blew in under the doors. Dr. Lay and myself stood at the foot of the little couch; the mother at the side, gently but ceaselessly moving a large fan to create a current of air and keep off the flies, which were beginning to show the troublesome but welcome signs of approaching change of weather. Alas, if it came too late! Our impatience was intense. "I do believe he would rally if the sea-breeze were to spring up," whispered Dr. Lay to me. The mother's senses, preternaturally sharpened, understood the words. The earnest, pleading look in her eyes seemed to penetrate beyond the brassy sky, as it were *compelling* the desired boon. The doctor turned from the bed and walked to the shuttered window. I knew that his *feeling* also was an unconscious prayer.

Presently, with unsteady hands, he undid the venetians, and the murmured "Thank God!" was almost more than our highly-strung feelings could bear.

The mother fell on her knees, hiding her face in the coverlet; suppressed sobs burst from her overcharged heart.

At the same moment her husband entered the room. "The rain, Lucy; the welcome rain!" Dr. Lay hastily withdrew; I followed him, but only to remain in the

parlour until I was satisfied about the effect of the change on our little patient. An hour after I also left the house, relieved and hopeful, feeling that the scene I had witnessed there would not easily be forgotten.

The next day Dr. Lay accompanied me in my visit. We found the boy refreshed and bright. The danger was passed; renewed strength was only a question of time and care.

Returning with Dr. Lay through Collins Street that morning, he said,—

"Mr. Raine wants to speak to me; wait while I go into the office."

We were close to the club; a knot of men lounged about the door as usual. A lady had just passed; very popular she was, and much respected by us all. Miss Julia was a universal favourite, and held in high esteem; but she was as untidy as she was good-hearted.

"I say, South, which do you back—for or against?" cried Woods as I approached.

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking round the group.

There was a general grin as Woods replied,—

"Why, that Miss Julia goes down Collins Street this day month with the same piece of fringe hanging loose from her dress."

"Tell you what, young men," said Dr. Lay, who had just come up, "I'll bet that Miss Julia is bent on some errand of kindness; and if her *fringe* is not right, her *heart* is, which is of more account."

"Well, doctor, we meant no harm, as you know," replied Woods apologetically.

"Ay, ay, boys; but when are you going back to your stations? Squatters have fine times, while we professionals work night and day."

"Come and see us at shearing," cried Alec Gower, "or

mustering time either; we work hard enough then for all the year round. And now I think of it, doctor, you're such a townsman, I don't believe you've ever been up the bush."

"Have too much to do in town," replied Dr. Lay sententiously.

"You never seem in a hurry."

"Haven't time to be in a hurry; it's you fellows who have little to do that are always in a hurry."

"He hit you there, Gower," laughed Woods. "It's not easy to get a rise out of the doctor; he takes time, but the answer 'll come."

"I give Dr. Lay up," exclaimed Gower; "he's past improving; but, South, *don't* you follow in his steps. You're a new chum; come along with me and see something of bush life. I'm going home to-morrow. Woods comes too; and we're taking old Captain Grant, who swears by the backwoods, he thinks Yankee bush beats Australian bush to shivers; but we'll show him a thing or two. His ship sails this week, so you're bound to be back in three or four days. We'll have a kangaroo hunt, at any rate."

"Thanks, Gower, but I expect your trap is full with the captain and Woods," I replied.

"Well, I've been telling the captain I'll insure him a bag of dry grass to sit on, and some mutton to eat. He's willing to take his chance; so do you."

"Go, my lad," said Dr. Lay; "I'll look up your patients to-morrow; and you'll be back a couple of days after."

"Start at twelve o'clock *sharp*," cried Gower.

"All right," I replied, "I'll be ready;" and went away in tiptop spirits at the prospect of my holiday.

As we drove homewards, Dr. Lay said to me, "'All's not gold that glitters.' If something does not turn up

soon, there'll be a tremendous smash among our merchants; half of them are virtually insolvent now. The country will just be a vast sheep-run."

And then he told me Mr. Raine had been asking him to join in persuading his wife to return to England. "He has come to his last hundred," added the doctor, "and wants her to go and take the boy while he is able to send them; but the brave little woman won't hear of it."

Afterwards I learnt that Dr. Lay made an attempt to fulfil Mr. Raine's request, but Mrs. Raine would not allow the subject to be discussed; her resolution was taken to share her husband's lot. They removed to a smaller house, dismissed their one servant, employing the office-boy's mother as occasional help. Early in the morning Mrs. Raine might be seen taking Freddy for a walk; and again, towards sundown, they would stroll out to meet the father returning from business. His careworn face would brighten as he caught sight of them. I have since heard him declare that he could not have borne up against the anxieties which, at that period, pressed on him so heavily, had it not been for the support he found in his wife's brave trust and patient hopefulness. But to return to my story.

The day following I was punctual to my engagement with Gower, and found him standing on the steps of the "Prince of Wales," surrounded by his party and some other friends.

The trap came round—something between a double dog-cart and a mail phaeton; four powerful but wild-looking animals harnessed to it—the off leader kicking viciously over the trace.

I exchanged glances with Captain Grant. Gower, observing us, exclaimed, "All play; they're as quiet as lambs, once they start. Get up quick!" He was already on the

box, handling the reins. Certainly his touch and voice steadied the animals; so completely was he master of them that our misgivings disappeared, and we looked on admiringly as he bowled away, taking the then unmade gutters in Collins Street at a gallop. Our friends watched us as we rose the hill towards what is now the western end of the principal streets. The sight of a hill before them fired the horses with a something of emulation; gathering their feet under them, they went at it with the motion of a bird on the wing. Down the hills the kicking leader again indulged his propensity. "Knows every step of the road; pleased he's going home!" cried Gower, admiringly, standing up with great equanimity to support the horses by the reins, as we were dashing down hill without a break, at the same moment drawing our attention to peculiar bits of scenery, or telling stories *à propos* of the locality.

Alec Gower was a princely fellow; animals recognized his power, men admired his high courage. Brave and generous, tender as a woman, the whole district was the better for his residence in it. He was regarded as a king among his neighbours. I believe it would have been good for *others* if he had been a king; perhaps not for *himself* though. His was a nature worth the training, and the discipline of circumstances was severe on him in after-days; but the heaviest trials only brought out more and more of the manly, undaunted spirit.

However, at this time, we thought little enough of the future; the present was thoroughly enjoyable.

Crossing the Salt Water river, we bore to the right over wide plains, covered with short grass, now brown and dry. On either side these plains stretched, entirely bare of trees. As we proceeded, purple hills rose in front, some of their summits towering into mountain peaks.

By-and-by a belt of fine trees indicated our approach to a creek; a sudden turn in the road showed a steep descent into a magnificent gorge, between rocky hills, backed by high table-land, thickly timbered. A noisy creek ran through the gorge, tumbling over large boulders, and dashing its spray against the pink quartz facing of the hill. Heaps of broken quartz, large trees, and pieces of fencing, now high above the stream, marked the height of the floods to which it is liable when the rains swell the mountain streams, and the narrow creek becomes a wide, rushing torrent.

Up the steep hill-side we went, still table-land, intermingled with grassy glades, skirted by a belt of thick forest, and immediately before us another abrupt descent through which, in winter, flowed another creek, now quite dry.

Here we found a man with fresh horses; these being put to, we started directly, for it began to get dark, and a storm was coming up from the distant mountains.

Presently the lightning flashed, and a loud clap of thunder echoed among the hills. Gower pressed the horses. It was now dark—the track a series of ups and downs—ups preponderating until we were nearly 2000 feet above Melbourne. Gower drove calmly on. "The horses know the road," said he; "even if I didn't, they're bound to take us home." As he spoke, a light was flashed in our faces, and a voice exclaimed, "Mercy on us! wha be ye?"

The light showed our leaders on a bank fronting a cottage, and apparently about to enter, as the terrified mistress of the house opened the door to ascertain the meaning of the noise outside. Finding herself face to face with the horses, "The Lord have mercy on ye! ye'll be kilt surely," she cried.

Gower was at their heads in a moment; how he backed

them I don't know, but he managed to get us safely down.

"Now we're all right," said he cheerfully; "this is the only troublesome place, and it was Whiteface's fault altogether; he keeps getting in front."

Whiteface was a riding-horse, whom we were bringing up; he was fastened by a rope to the near leader, and kept performing erratic movements in various directions, "I'll loose him; he'll find his way home now," continued Gower, handing the reins to Woods, who sat by his side.

Whiteface bolted off as soon as he understood that he was free, and Gower had scarce time to climb to his seat before the carriage-horses followed.

"There's a steep pinch the other side; I shall pull them up there. Look out for a shake at the bottom here!" he cried.

And so he did; but the fillip they had got kept them bristling for another chance.

"Come, now," remonstrated their master, "no more play; here's real work, laddies;" and the animals answered to the call on their energies as he drove boldly into a small river, even at that season rushing pretty strongly over its stony bed. They breasted the current; and, after one or two balks, brought the carriage up the bank.

"Hurrah for home! here we are on the run!" shouted Gower, bowling along among stumps and trees towards a light facing us. As we neared it, a gate was flung back with "That be you, sir?—it's a wild night."

Another gate, and we pulled up before a long, low building, well lighted.

"Welcome to Tarleigh!" cried our host. "All well Jim?" to the groom.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Then dinner in half an hour,"—and he showed us our

rooms. They opened on to a deep verandah; the captain's was directly opposite mine.

"Thank God, we're clear of them breakers!" said he; "sartainly being ashore in the backwoods is no joke; but he handled the craft first-rate. I guess I'm not so brave as I fancied—eh, mate?"

"You didn't show alarm, captain, any way," I replied. "Mr. Gower didn't give us time to be frightened. I don't think we had much inclination either, after we got into the spirit of the thing."

I retired to my room, leaving the Yankee skipper shaking his head dubiously.

I confess I was surprised on entering the dining-room. The table and its appointments, for so small a party, would have done no discredit to a Belgravian mansion. The butler, in faultless get-up, stood behind his master; and another man, in equally decorous costume, at the bottom of the table. Captain Grant opened his eyes at this exhibition of bush civilization.

"Are you doubtful about the gunny-bags I promised for a seat?" inquired our host.

"By George! Gower does things in style," Woods whispered to me. It was afterwards explained to us that butler No. 1, who had been in Gower's service some years, had lately taken up some ground for himself, and was initiating No. 2 in his duties before leaving.

"They appear on the boards together on this occasion only," laughed Gower, "in order to propitiate you new chums."

I guess we all slept soundly that night; I did, I know.

Wakening at daylight, thoroughly refreshed, I turned out, determined to get a bathe in the creek below, and take a walk before the others were stirring. It was my first experience of the bush. How fresh the morning

was! how clear the air! how soft and springy the turf sloping towards the large dams, and by the creek-side! The elasticity of youth and the charm of novelty threw a halo over it all.

From my bedroom I had noticed a high, round-topped hill, clothed with gums and shea-oaks to the very summit. I turned my face in that direction, and ascended the hill. I found the top a mass of dark rock—apparently a combination of ironstone and shale, broken in many places. Large pieces of lava lay about; splendid ferns grew among the broken rocks, lovely maiden-hair and delicate moss nestling in the crevices; the clearer stony ground, kept moist by springs, was a mass of colour—purple and crimson heaths trailing along it in all directions.

The sun rose behind a mountain range, thickly timbered and undulating—the dark trees thrown into strong contrast by the golden rays which wrapped the higher peaks in a blaze of light. Mountain after mountain piled against the sky as far as the eye could reach; slowly they emerged from the grey twilight, rearing their heads proudly to face the coming day. How lonely the forest looked! No white man's foot had trodden that dense scrub which stretched on and on interminably.

Now it feeds three saw-mills, and is noisy with the sound of the steam-engine. *Then* it lay silently majestic, its great trees interlacing their branches, and defying the rising sun to penetrate their impervious depths.

Turning southward, I caught a glimpse of the sea, and could distinguish the Red Bluff beyond—what is now Brighton. Looking thus, on hundreds of miles of country, utterly silent and uninhabited, I thought of our overcrowded streets and lanes in Great Britain, wondering why some of the inhabitants did not come to cultivate this fresh soil, and lay bare the riches beneath its surface.

Was it almost sacrilege to contemplate the rousing of Nature from the grand stillness of her virgin mood?

"Coo—ey, co—oo—ey!" from behind. A lad was at my elbow. The master had sent him to hasten my return. He piloted me by a shorter cut, through cultivated paddocks and a farm-yard, to the homestead.

Arrived there, I found all bustle and preparation. Breakfast was half over. As I bolted mine, I heard that, before he slept, our indefatigible host had taken measures to arrange a kangaroo hunt on a small scale, as the best way of showing us a little of the country and its sport during our very short stay.

CHAPTER III.

A "boomer."—A change in the programme.—Sighting the enemy.—Pursuer pursued.

I WAS unaware of the proposed expedition, and did not anticipate breakfast at such an early hour; but it was needful to be thus early, because, even then, the kangaroo were chiefly found while the dew yet glistened on the grass. At mid-day they commonly retire to sheltered coverts, whence they re-emerge late in the afternoon. My absence had caused delay, and we had little time to spare —a ride of some miles being before us. I mounted the horse prepared for me, and, as we passed through Gower's own ground at an easy pace, had an opportunity of looking about me and observing our mount.

Our host himself was on a large chestnut of deep colour nearly brown, well up to his rider's weight—a horse that would have done credit to any hunting-field in England, able to hold his own over a Yorkshire wall or Leicester loam-field.

Woods was mounted on a grey—in all respects, except colour, a match for the chestnut. Captain Grant bestrode "the Arab," an elderly mare, docile and easy, with fair spirit and plenty of strength yet remaining.

My steed was a mare also, a speckled roan, light, with a springy motion, indicative of life and spirit—qualities which were tested during that day's ride, none of the details of which I am likely to forget, both horse and

rider having narrowly escaped a final snuff-out. By the time we reached the last gate our horses had warmed to their work, and Gower, pushing forward, signalled the dogs to follow.

"Hi, Growler! Pip! this won't do, we must brush on." Then with a "Forward, boys!" he bent to his horse's neck, and the animal, without touch of whip or spur, answered to the movement, bounding on at an easy canter.

We were not slow in following. A few minutes brought us to the little township of Tars, consisting then of about half a dozen houses. I hear now of its post and telegraph office, banks, and mechanics' institute, town-hall, churches, &c. When we cantered through, its streets existed only on the surveyor's plan, and its public buildings in his prophetic eye alone. A fairly-cleared track represented the former, and a large smithy the latter.

Our dogs seemed at home here, and even disposed to invite the company of a friend, the property of the blacksmith. Their master, however, speedily checked their social proclivities.

Both were noble creatures, a cross between the greyhound and the mastiff, uniting the grace and speed of the former with the courage and strength of the latter. Dogs of this breed can endure immense fatigue; the depth of chest and power of limb fits them to cope with the old man-kangaroo—an antagonist to be by no means despised.

A remark of mine concerning the dogs drew from Gower some anecdotes of kangaroo hunting.

"I hope," said he, "we shall fall in with a 'boomer;' that sort show pluck, and sense too."

"What's a 'boomer'?" I interrupted.

"Oh, an old man-kangaroo—a fellow who, when he finds that he is hard pressed by the hounds, plants himself against a large tree and stands at bay. I assure you it requires a good dog to dislodge him. Many a gallant

hound has lost his life in the attempt. You know the kangaroo's hind foot has a long, sharp-pointed talon—woe to the dog that comes within range of it! A downward blow with this is as fatal as a bayonet-wound. It catches the dog in the abdomen, and lays him dead in a second."

"Worse than a wild buffalo," interjected the Yankee.

"Perhaps more cunning," Gower replied. "I have known a kangaroo brought to bay near water stand deliberately in the middle of the stream, and endeavour to drown the dogs by holding them under the water. I recollect one of my shepherds having a singular experience when kangarooing on the run one day. He was on foot and had only one dog, more of a collie than a hound. The dog, however, was thorough game, and had brought the chase to bay in a rocky ravine where huge stones and masses of rock lay singly or in heaps together. The kangaroo had sheltered against one of the larger masses, a couple of smaller ones forming a breastwork in front. The collie kept barking at his game, but not quite liking to come to close quarters, when the shepherd came up. Encouraged by his master's presence, the dog made a spring at the enemy's throat, but the fatal claw met and tore him frightfully. Bleeding and mangled, he fell back, never to rise again. The man was enraged at the loss of his dog, and, though armed only with a stick, rushed to the attack. He missed his footing among the stones and nearly fell. Before he could recover and make use of his stick, he felt a powerful grasp round his waist. The kangaroo held him in a close but by no means loving embrace. The creature's instinct told it that the advantage in this deadly game was his. He seized his half-prostrate antagonist—by no means a small man or of light weight—and bounded off, carrying him under his arm. Luckily, however, he was not quite up to this unusual method of progression, and dropped his burden after the third or fourth

leap. The shepherd was something shaken, but not really hurt. He never again put himself in the way of repeating the experiment, but eschewed kangaroo hunting from that day. He would not allow that he had been frightened, but said it was a kind of travelling he was not used to, and disagreeably shaky for a man of his years."

"I remember Bingham telling me about it," remarked Woods. "I was up here at the time. The grim old fellow was sulky for a week about his dog and his torn clothes. I never heard of a similar instance though."

"Neither have I," Gower answered, as we came out on to the open, after rising the ascent from the township.

On our left was a narrow valley which gradually deepened and widened as we advanced, the hills on either side being very steep and rocky. Beyond, on our right, lightly-timbered plains extended some distance.

On these plains we hoped to find our game and to make acquaintance with an old man-kangaroo.

Slackening speed that the horses might get a breathing before the chase commenced, we observed a rider coming rapidly towards us.

"Anything wrong at Siock?" asked Gower, as the man rode up, and proved to be a neighbouring station-hand.

"No, sir; the master was sending this note to you."

Gower opened it, and, glancing through, exclaimed, "We're in luck's way. This will be surer fun than the kangarooing, for which I was beginning to fear we are a little late."

The note was from Mr. Roberts, of Siock station, and asked Gower's assistance in hunting down a mob of wild cattle which had been for some time among the hills on his run, and were now becoming troublesome as decoys, occasioning him loss and annoyance.

Originally three or four had got adrift from the run; they were now increased to about a dozen. The place

where they herded was very inaccessible, so he had resolved to shoot them as the shortest method of getting rid of the trouble they caused. Several of his neighbours were invited to join in the sport.

Until that morning Mr. Roberts had believed Gower to be in town; but, hearing then of his return, the messenger had been despatched in hot haste, as the hunt was to take place that day.

"This will beat kangarooing hollow," cried Woods excitedly, offering to ride back to Tarleigh with the messenger for fire-arms.

"You know, Mr. Gower," said the man, "I was intending to go there; the master has arranged to allow time for me to get to you and back."

"All right, then; vanish!"—and before the words were well out of his mouth, Woods and the Siock hand were off.

We pursued our way leisurely, knowing that our friend could not return with the pistols for a couple of hours, and it was useless to go forward without fire-arms.

We rode along the ridge overlooking the valley for about two miles in the direction of the hills facing us. A similar valley opened on our right and gradually approached the first. Suddenly the ridge narrowed to a point, with a precipitous descent on either side.

The captain and myself reined up simultaneously to take in the details of the singular scene around us.

To the right the eye ranged over a wild, rocky ravine, on one side bounded by the ridge on which we stood; on the other by a still loftier barrier, up whose steep ascent we could faintly trace a winding track—the road to Geelong, our host said, though how it was possible to get wheeled vehicles up there puzzled my inexperience.

The left-hand valley, above which we had been travelling, now opened out into a beautiful basin. Shut in

by a noble mountain in front, it swept away to the north-east in a series of swelling undulations, which had the appearance of being the roots from whence the hills sprang.

We were now on the extreme point of the ridge, and began to descend a narrow neck between the two valleys. Presently, turning sharp to the left, we found the hill changing its hitherto rugged character, and softening into a grassy slope, steep and, in dry weather, slippery. Spreading trees dotted the broad slope, which wound gently into the vale below. From this point the view was exceedingly fine. Behind was the narrow table-land along which we had ridden, with glimpses on either side of the two valleys in their wild beauty. From the steep hill-side masses of rock protruded among the low shrub-like acacias, crowned here and there with the shea-oaks, from which the station derived its name. In front lay Siock vale itself; a creek, flowing sluggishly, served to keep its rich pasture green and fresh, even towards the end of summer. On the farther side of the vale the view was effectually barred by the abrupt rising of a high conical hill, whose grassy sides merged at the summit into a turreted cliff. This hill seemed to be a continuation of the ridge on our side of the vale. On our left hand, the valley we had seen from the top stretched away to a considerable distance, and was at length lost among the enclosing hills which bounded the horizon.

In the deep seclusion of this vale stood Siock homestead, 800 feet below us. It was a good-sized stone house, surrounded by a flower-garden and orchard, most commodious, and, for those days, a grand residence. The gardens were barely laid out, but gave promise of great beauty, being irrigated in a rough primitive style from the creek at the foot of the orchard. Beyond the creek towered the rock-crowned monarch of the hills, forming from the windows of the house a view of combined beauty and grandeur seldom equalled.

We arrived earlier than Mr. Roberts had expected. Captain Grant and myself found a cordial welcome, and felt at once perfectly at home.

Woods returned very soon, accompanied by the messenger. They brought two revolvers and a pair of holster pistols, single barrels. These belonged to Alec Gower, the revolvers to Captain Grant and myself. We took a trip all round, and started without further delay.

I was too much excited to notice the place up which we now rode. I know it was a gorge between hills of similar character to those we had already traversed, but wilder and more broken.

As we proceeded, leisurely at first, on account of the rugged ground, Mr. Roberts explained his plan. So soon as we caught sight of the cattle, he proposed that we should all give chase, shouting and cracking our stock-whips, so as not to give the animals time to charge us, which they would certainly do if we did not commence the attack. The object was to overtake a beast, pistol in hand, and, ranging up full speed, side and side, to put the ball through his head. Properly aimed, the effect is instantaneous; the animal drops, or staggers only a few paces, carried by its own impetus. Nerve and dexterity are of course required, for if the shot fails, or is badly aimed, the rider is exposed to imminent risk. Before we had done, I learnt this by experience; and so did the captain; but, in our first exhilaration, any rashness seemed reasonable.

On the present occasion the nature of the ground increased the risk. In about an hour we caught sight of three or four head of the cattle we were seeking, yet at some distance. We rode on quietly until they perceived us. Pawing the ground, with tails erect, they looked dangerous; but we were a large party, and the cracking of the stock-whips frightened them.

They turned and fled at a pace which tried the mettle of our horses. Carried away by the excitement of the chase, I was quite oblivious of the country we passed over at racing speed; only as we returned did I perceive what a mad ride it had been. I should not have believed that horses could have kept their feet, going at that pace, over such irregular and rocky ground.

But to return to the hunt. So far as was practicable, each of us singled out his own beast. Dashing along at full gallop, the stock-whips were no longer needed, as the object was now not to urge the animals forward, but to overtake them.

Roberts was the first to do this. He was in chase of a powerful red bull. For a few moments the stride of pursuer and pursued kept time together; then our friend gained a little; he had succeeded in keeping the game on his right hand—the most advantageous position. His horse was now slightly in advance of the bull, bringing its rider even with the creature's head.

A flash—a report—a thin curl of grey smoke—and with bellowing roar the magnificent beast fell headlong forward, and ceased to move.

Steed and rider passed on a few paces, then drew up to look about for the rest of the field.

Being close on his left rear, I saw the whole encounter, though busily engaged with my own quarry.

Unluckily, I had got on the wrong side, having been forced, by a mass of rock that lay in my way, either to slacken speed and allow my beast to go ahead, or to forge up on the wrong side. I foolishly took the latter alternative, and, a minute or two after Roberts, I also fired.

My first shot passed over the animal's neck; the second took effect, but only imperfectly. I was then in advance, and the creature, maddened with rage, charged wildly at my horse. It was impossible to repeat my fire, though I still had four barrels loaded.

"Spur for your life!" shouted Roberts.

It was, indeed, all I could do. We were completely at the mercy of the infuriated beast. Happily, he was behind, and his wide-spreading horns, instead of goring my mare, reached one on either side of her quarters, but did not actually wound her.

The mare, on her part, objecting to the pressure behind, retaliated by vigorous kicks. The lifting of the bull's head, trying to toss his enemy, so assisted her motion that it took all I could do to retain my seat.

I had just time to realize the peril of my position, when Gower rode up on the left of the bull; and, leaning over till the muzzle of his pistol almost touched its head, fired.

The ball entered just below his ear, and I was safe. It was some minutes, however, before I could pacify my horse, which had become unmanageable from fright at the novel attack.

Gower reined up immediately; and when I had regained command of the mare, I looked round for him. Horse and rider were standing by the side of the dead beast, as calm and collected as if nothing unusual had occurred.

I can scarcely say as much for myself; I felt as a man escaped from a great danger, and knew that I owed my escape to Gower's presence of mind and cool courage.

The chase was not yet over. Necessarily, each incident must be related separately, though, in reality, they took place almost simultaneously.

Grant, also, had his chase on hand; and while I was being so unceremoniously shaken by my enemy, he was endeavouring to bring down his.

He lodged two balls in the shoulder, but not effectually. Fortunately a tree was at hand; he took advantage of it, so that he and the beast passed it, one on either side. The latter rushed madly on, and the captain availed

himself of the chance to wheel round in order to return to us.

At that moment Gower's bullock, which he had left to come to my assistance, dashed directly in the captain's path—his eyes flaming, and nostrils covered with foam. Two pistols fired in one report, and both balls told on the bullock's side, but did not check his career.

The captain had barely time to swerve aside, delivering at the same moment two barrels at the creature's forehead—with what effect was never known.

It rushed on, passing him so closely that the point of his horn grazed his horse's flank, and left a mark about fifteen inches in length, completely denuded of hair, though the skin was not even broken. How it missed the rider's knee seems wonderful; but such was the fact. A remarkable escape it was, and one which I should hardly have credited, had it not happened under my own eyes.

With this ended my first wild cattle hunt, and I fully agreed with the messenger we had met in the morning, that "it beat kangarooing hollow."

The hunt was naturally the subject of our discourse, returning to Tarleigh.

Gower—who had been in New South Wales some years before—told stories of narrow escapes he had seen there, but said that he considered it dangerous at all times, and especially so in broken country.

"I shall advise Roberts to try the rifle another time," he said; "it can be used at safer range;"—an advice which I heard was afterwards followed.

We were pretty well tired when we reached Tarleigh that evening, but had enjoyed our day immensely, in spite of its risks—and I fancy we doubly enjoyed talking of them.

The captain, however, remarked that he shouldn't try it again; "good things shouldn't be repeated too often."

CHAPTER IV.

Bush yarns.—A black funeral.—Home again.

"After dinner that night we lounged about the verandah, smoking. The incidents of the hunt had been fully discussed; we had exchanged individual impressions, observations, and opinions concerning the sport, the scenery, and the company; we were now enjoying the luxury of silence and rest.

After a while Gower broke out with, "What a queer life this is! How different from the stereotyped routine of the old home! I always wished to be a soldier; I think bush life is next door to that."

"Well," said the captain, between the puffs of his pipe, "we sailors see a bit of the world, but I guess you men who open fresh country get most adventure."

"It's a grand thing to be the pioneer of civilization, opening up a new continent," I remarked. "Think of the hundreds of one's fellow-creatures who will be benefited, and—"

"Oh, ay, my dear fellow; good of our species, &c., &c.," interrupted Woods. "Let's consider all that said, and do you, Alec, tell us the story of the Shea-oak Paddock we passed this morning—you said it had one."

"Why, yes, rather; 'twas there H—— the bushranger was captured. One of my stockmen, and Fenton from the township below, were turning in some horses early in the morning. They kept rope and halters in that broken-

down hut you noticed in the paddock. No sooner had they opened the door than a shot was fired at them. Fenton rushed forward bang against the person who had fired. Without a word he fired again; the ball went over Fenton's head. The fellow mistook his vocation when he attempted fire-arms; he was better with the knife. Fenton threw himself on him, trying to seize the gun; H—— drew his knife, and stabbed Fenton; but the latter still kept his hold, and succeeded in forcing the gun from him, then hit him with the but-end, and made a dash for the knife. It was a terrible struggle; the bushranger stabbed Fenton five times—made mince-meat of his hands —but his blood was up, and he held on like a bull-dog, and at last got the fellow under, and wrenched the knife from him. He appeared stunned, and Fenton called Bob the stockman to keep guard over him, while he went off for assistance. Bob was thoroughly frightened; he didn't dare go inside the hut, but walked up and down outside, gun in hand. Presently he heard something, and, before he could turn, a bullet whizzed past. H—— had rallied, pushed aside a wooden shutter, drawn out his revolver, and fired; he then made a rush from the hut, all bleeding from his wounds. Bob vainly called on him to stop, and then fired at his back; the bullet passed through to his chest, and he fell dead. So in that paddock ended the career of the noted bushranger who had made the Sydney side too hot to hold him."

"Fenton showed great pluck," Woods remarked.

"Yes, he behaved right gallantly. Bob is a poor fellow; if his mate had not possessed more courage, these ranges would have been a very nest of bushrangers. Thanks to Fenton, the gentlemen of the bush have fought shy of us ever since; it was their first and last attempt here."

"I hope you all made much of Fenton?"

"Oh, yes. He was fêted—became in fact the hero of

the district. We got up a testimonial, and Government came down handsomely. He was set up in his own 'public,' where he has lived comfortably ever since, though I am sorry to say he never entirely recovered from the effect of his wounds. His sight was injured, and one of his hands; but he never complains of these results of the brave stand he made."

This story reminded me of a letter I had lately received from a friend I made on board ship. Mr. Elton, one of our passengers, and myself had been great chums. He had gone to some relatives in the Sydney district to gain "colonial experience"—a commodity of which new arrivals heard a great deal. When he should have succeeded in achieving its possession, Elton intended to take a station in Port Phillip country. Meantime I heard from him occasionally.

"*A propos* of the Fenton-cum-Bob tragedy," said I, addressing our host, "I should like to ask you about a story Elton relates in one of his letters. Some friends of his in New South Wales were stopped by bushrangers, who took their valuables and their horses. Leaving them bound in the scrub, the robbers were riding away, when one of the party, managing to extract a card from his pocket, handed it to the leader, politely requesting that, when he had quite done with his horse, he would turn it adrift with that card fastened to it—the horse being an old favourite. This happened some time ago, and Elton tells me the horse has just been advertised as having strayed on to a run with this card tied round its neck—the words, 'With compliments and thanks,' being written across it. Do you think it's a likely story?"

"It's perfectly true," Gower answered; "it happened to Shelton, of Birgarra—I heard all about it."

"Then all bushrangers are not so ferocious as he of the Shea-oak Paddock?"

"I don't know about ferocity; certainly some have a veneer of refinement, but it's very thin, and doesn't stand the smallest strain in the form of resistance."

"I fancy," Woods remarked, "these gentlemen of the would-be Dick Turpin school, who salute with quite a distinguished air as they ride off, carrying your watch and purse, are really the worst. When a fellow outs with his knife, you know what to be at; but it's mighty aggravating to be bowed out of your belongings, and not able to knock the thief down."

"You speak feelingly, my friend," drawled the captain. "I suppose you've had your turn at these little mischances?"

Gower laughed, looking significantly at Woods.

The latter said, "I owed my life on one occasion to the blacks."

"To *a native*," corrected Gower, emphasizing the last word, adding thoughtfully, "I wonder what has become of poor Susy?"

"She died," Woods replied shortly, and he walked away.

We saw that the subject was a sore one, and of course did not press for details of our friend's intercourse with bushrangers.

Presently I remarked that I had seen no natives about.

"No," answered Gower, "their chief, old Warrego, died in yonder valley some years ago, and since then no black will spend a night in it. They pass through occasionally, but never stay."

"Was the chief buried about here?"

"Yes, I went to his funeral. The whole tribe assembled, men in front, women and children in the background. The grave was dug for a body in a sitting posture, and the old man carefully wrapped in his rug, laid in it with great ceremony, and some curious gesticulations.

His successor then came forward and placed the dead chief's bomerang, spear, and arrows, on his knee. They then commenced a monotonous chant in their own language, the outer circle of women beating time, all pointing at intervals towards the East. Afterwards a woman stepped forward, carrying something under her rug, which she handed to the new chief, he placing it in the grave. They would not let me go near enough to see what it was. You know they jealously guard anything connected with their dead. In fact, you cannot get them to speak of them, or of their funeral ceremonies. It was as a great favour I was allowed to be near; had I attempted to pry into their doings, they would simply have deceived me, and I should have lost their confidence. I have tried indirectly to find out what that woman produced to be buried with Warrego, but I have never been able to get them to tell me. It looked wonderfully like a child. Still I don't know that it was. Afterwards they carefully filled up the grave, and stamped the earth down; then covered all with grass, endeavouring to obliterate every trace of it. Certain marks were made on some trees near, and the tribe decamped that same night. Warrego would never again be mentioned among them, and any one bearing his name would change it."

"I was under the impression that your natives buried in trees," I remarked.

"Some tribes do; their customs vary. There is a native burying-ground down south"—and Gower pointed towards Station Peak. "The bodies there are wrapped in rugs, or covered with leaves, and suspended among the topmost branches of the trees."

"Have they any notion of a future existence?"

"I can't say; but it would seem as if they had, for when they fancy they detect among us a resemblance in feature, voice, or manner to some of their dead, they

will not name the person, but say, 'Black fellow jumped up white fellow,' as if the idea of another life was not altogether outside their thoughts."

"I've not seen many of your blacks," said Captain Grant; "but those I have seen differ entirely from our niggers, and from the Malays or Maories either."

"Yes; I've my theory," replied Gower. "I know that in some of the Polynesian Islands the criminal population are sent adrift in open canoes. A good many are lost at sea, no doubt, but some will get cast on other islands. Given vice to begin with, climate and scarcity of food will quickly do the work of deterioration. They're a poor race, though sharp and very imitative."

"They've been badly treated," remarked Woods, who had rejoined us.

"Ay, some of the settlers have been brutes to them. I remember visiting some stalactite caves on the Wannon, into one of which a black fellow crawled to die, having been shot like a dog by a settler near. It was not known for a long while what had become of him; however, when the caves were discovered and examined, he was found in the furthest. The limestone had preserved the body, forming crystals about it. A party of us visited the caves; the son of the man supposed to be the murderer was among us. He, poor fellow, could not help what his father had done, yet I felt a disgust at his presence—an instinctive loathing, as if he must be a brute too."

"What a splendid night!" cried Woods, turning the conversation.

We rose and left the verandah, strolling on to the lawn in front. The scent of the gums came strongly from the forest. The great shadow of the bare hill behind the house loomed out in dim grandeur; the little township lay sleeping below; two mountains, wooded to their summits, rose in the foreground; all round the horizon

the high table-land was dotted with round-topped hills, rising abruptly, clothed with short grass and feathery trees, while the endless forest stretched far, far beyond our sight.

One thought of the silence of the primeval world, and wondered whether for these pathless wilds also a future of noisy activity was in store, when busy feet should tread them, and the hum of human life stir their stillness. Little we thought how near this was—how soon the tread of diggers, the whistle of machinery, the march of civilization would break in on the solemn quiet of this "Great Lone Land." Of course it is best so; yet I am glad to have seen the grand old forests and mountains in their mysterious majesty. "The everlasting hills!"—the memory of them exerts a soothing influence. It is like the thought of eternity! In their presence our puny span of hopes and disappointments dwindle. Vaguely I *felt* this then, but not till years had passed could I *realize* it.

The following day we left Tarleigh and returned to Melbourne.

CHAPTER V.

Our charioteer.—Idealizing and idolizing.—Hopes and fears.—Jilted!

Gower did not drive us back; business kept him at the station. Our charioteer was an Irishman; not exactly an overseer, for our friend was his own overseer, though Denis exercised this office when his master was absent. He was devoted to Gower, and thoroughly trustworthy. Our journey down was enlivened by Denis's shrewd remarks and laughable anecdotes. He knew about everything and everybody, and, when he didn't know, had no misgivings as to the correctness of his shrewd guesses, nor much reticence in sharing them with others. With an Irishman's vivacity he rattled on, telling us of the people rather than of the district, proving as amusingly *personal* in his remarks as his master had been amusingly *general* in his.

Passing miles of bush-land securely fenced, which, on our journey up, Gower had pointed out as producing feed of great richness, capable of carrying sixty sheep to the acre, Denis told of the proprietor of this fine estate of 10,000 acres,—

"Ye'll surely believe how proud I am that me counthryman, who had the lanest of pigs and the smallest of taties in Ould Ireland, should own such a grand place out here. So, doctor," he continued, turning to me, "maybe ye'll now give us credit for thrift and industry."

This in allusion to a remark of mine respecting a tumbledown cottage, with children and pigs hanging about the broken fence. "Surely an Irishman's castle," I had said, and Denis overheard.

As he now discoursed grandiloquently on his "counthryman's" glory as the owner of 10,000 acres, Woods burst out laughing,—

"Well done, Denis! Everything's fair in love and patriotism, eh?"

"Shure, Mr. Woods, ye'll uphold the honour of yer counthry?" cried our driver, feeling emboldened to tip Woods the wink as a fellow-countryman.

"Come, come," interrupted the captain, "ye'll not cram us that way. I know something of your Paddies; I never met with one who got 10,000 acres out of nothing. More likely it's one of their canny neighbours."

"Ye're a gentleman of discrimination, sir," remarked Denis demurely.

Woods acknowledged that the skipper had guessed right, for the worthy proprietor of the estate in question commenced life as a small shopkeeper in one of the southern towns of Scotland. By his business talents and industry he amassed a large fortune, which he used well.

When we got on to the plains, Denis pointed to a large tract of country on our left, and told us how the owner of it, when a bullock-driver on the Sydney side, had vowed he would be the richest man in the colonies, and was in a fair way of becoming so. Soon we caught sight of the Salt Water river, and I observed that we had got down more smoothly than I expected, judging from our journey up.

"Ah," said Denis, "the master's rale famous with the horses."

At that moment a dignitary of the Church passed us; he looked hard at the carriage.

"His riv'rence don't forget the Master's lambs," Denis remarked. "Once he was in our part, among the stations, and we—that is, Mr. Gower—was driving him and a parson who came down from Sydney with him. I remember he'd got the roan horse leading; he was just broken in, and awful for shying. Just as we passed a gate, a cow popped her head up the other side; Parson, he shies right over the log fence—we called the roan 'Parson' after that. Well, what does Mr. Gower do? Why, 'Denis,' says he, 'just jump down, fling your hat at that fellow, and make him shy back again.' Ay, but ye should have seen his riv'rence's face."

"That beats," said the captain. "I shall believe in that Irish chap after all—Charley What-d'-ye-call-him?"

"Charley O'Malley," I suggested.

"That's it. My second mate is a Paddy, and he's always bragging about that chap and his horses."

"Ah," remarked Denis regretfully, "if the master had only been an Irishman, he'd have done credit to the counthry; but shure we can't all be parfect."

Denis shook his head and addressed himself to his horses,—

"Here's Melbourne, my lads, and yer stable's near! Stump along!"

So we rattled into the town.

The first thing I heard was that a vessel had arrived from England. It was too late to go to the post-office that night, but I went next morning so soon as it was open.

Before telling what I there found, I must say a little about myself. I did not mean to do so when I began, intending to describe only what lay outside of myself.

You know it was the receipt of a letter from home that stirred me to commence this writing. Opening the vent of long-closed feeling has done me good. It has taught

me something, too. The sealed-up past does not seem nearly so terrible since I venture to face it.

I've been a cynical, bitter man for nearly twenty years —at least, I thought I was; but somehow I don't feel half so bitter since I ventured to unlock the skeleton cupboard, and now I don't mind fairly opening the door.

It seems to me that I am recording the incidents of some previous life, and altogether from an outside point of view.

The grim old country doctor can write of the dashing young town surgeon as of an altogether different person. The former has nursed the wrongs of the latter all these years; he now takes them out and looks at them, and they don't affect him so very much after all.

Time is a wonderful healer: age is a mighty calmer. A busy life is a famous panacea for a wounded heart.

I've sneered at women, and laughed at love; the one's a delusion, and the other a snare; and I'll tell you how I came to find that out.

When I was apprenticed to my uncle, the surgeon of Lowford, his wife's sister resided in his house. She was a handsome woman, cold and ambitious, clever and penniless. Her sister—my uncle's wife—had a large family. She helped with the children, but she disliked children. She loved self and ease; longed for independence, and a position of her own.

I did not "*so*" read her then. I thought the vulgar cares of domestic life jarred on her sensitive nature—that her loving heart craved love for *itself* alone.

I was an impressionable lad, she a beautiful woman, some years my senior. I began by idealizing, and ended by idolizing her. My father, Colonel South, was poor. The house we lived in, and a small farm attached to it, belonged to him; for the rest, he had but his pay. My mother I scarcely remember; an elder sister and myself

formed, at that period, his whole family. My sister was always an invalid. Any little property our father might accumulate would, of course, be for her. I had my own way to make in the world, which I regarded as an advantage, because it necessitated a fixed occupation, and held forth a definite object. Entering life with a good education, and thoroughly prepared for his profession, it is a man's own fault if his career be not honourably successful. I understood that, and hopefully anticipated my future. The medical profession was my own choice. My father proposed to give me every advantage for study.

"Then, lad," he would say, "you must rely on yourself."

And I cheerfully accepted the responsibility, confident of a distinguished place among those who devote their best energies to the alleviation of human suffering.

How completely I was mistaken in myself! What a miserable result of all my youthful dreams! Here I am, past middle age, an unknown doctor on the diggings—my name and former standing only remembered by one or two of my early associates, who have long since passed me in the race.

Looking back, I can now see that it was unworthy, cowardly to have abandoned all, because the woman I loved jilted me. Indeed, I begin to be haunted by a misgiving whether temper and pride, as well as wounded affection, had not a large share in the disappointment which turned the current of my life.

Certainly, however, it was my love for Caroline Ennis which prompted me to abandon the idea of becoming an army surgeon. It had gained such a hold on me before I left my uncle that I resolved to aim at establishing myself where I could hope to attain a fair position, and provide a settled home speedily.

Caroline had never committed herself to an engage-

ment, insisting that our families would raise objections, especially as she was older than myself. Never did she permit any open show of affection from me.

This secrecy added fuel to the fire which burned within me, and gave what I fondly called *our* attachment that tinge of romance which enhanced its sweetness.

While I was in London, walking the hospitals, and afterwards at Paris, we corresponded secretly; *her* letters were reticent, and somewhat rare; *I* wrote often, and poured out my full heart.

At every opportunity I ran done to Lowford for the chance of seeing her, if only for a few hours.

Often she would elude all my schemes for a private interview, and when she did permit it she adhered to her resolution of making no open engagement until I was in a position to act independently of our relatives.

Just as I had completed my studies I fell in with a former fellow-student, who was going out to New Zealand as surgeon to a vessel taking emigrants to the Canterbury settlement, then much talked of.

Said he to me, "One may wait years in England before getting into a practice that justifies one in marrying. I want my Jane, and she has no money; so I mean to go where I have a chance of making enough for us both—and that pretty quickly."

I did not dare to speak of "my Caroline;" but I feel that he expressed precisely my own desire. Whenever I thought of the future, his words recurred to me.

It was a long time since I had heard from Caroline. I determined to see her, and talk over my vague idea of settling in Australia. She was then on a visit to my own sister, in our father's house.

I found her more reserved than ever, and had great difficulty in speaking with her alone. When I had succeeded in making an opportunity, and commenced to

tell her of my Australian plan, she caught at it eagerly, and urged me to carry it out. I fondly thought it was because she thus saw a prospect of my being able to claim her more speedily.

She certainly encouraged that thought, drawing me on (as she well knew how) until I was prepared to sacrifice anything to win *her*.

Seeing that remaining in England would involve a longer probation, I resolved to hesitate no more, but at once to take steps for trying my chance of preparing a home for Caroline in a new country.

In one thing I was very urgent with her, it was that she would promise to be mine so soon as I had a suitable home to receive her.

After much entreaty she gave this promise, contingent on my keeping our relations to each other strictly secret, and writing to her under initials addressed to the General Post Office of a large town in our neighbourhood.

I agreed to all these precautions against discovery, feeling that, as I left her alone to bear the brunt of any objections our family might make to our marriage, I was bound to submit to the precautions she thought needful.

My father opposed the Australian project; but circumstances favoured it.

A vessel was about to sail with emigrants to Port Phillip. The appointment of surgeon was offered to me, through the kind offices of a friend, to whom I had confided my wish for such a position.

My father at length withdrew his opposition.

"You are young," said he; "perhaps it is as well that you should see something of the world. I hope you will return a wise man, and be content to settle among your own people."

He had a high opinion of Caroline's sense and ability, and I fancy it was she who suggested that the discomforts

of the sea, and the roughness of colonial life, would soon cure me of my taste for roving, and that I should return gladly to settle at home.

Thus it was that I left the old country.

My one object was to win money and position for Caroline; she was always in my thoughts, nestled at the bottom of my heart. Everything I did had reference to her; everything I possessed was to be shared with her.

As I stood on the high, bare hill at the back of Tarleigh, I had thought of her, and pictured to myself the pleasure of looking on this lovely solitude one day with her.

As I gazed on the star-lit sky I longed for the time when, hand in hand, we two should wander beneath the brilliant orbs of the southern heavens.

On our journey back from Tarleigh I thought how I would, in my next letter, describe to Caroline the adventures of our bush expedition.

It was nearly six months since I had heard from home; so, with my heart full of eager hope, I went to the post-office the morning after my return to Melbourne.

A letter was handed to me.

My father's writing! I broke the seal, and perceived that it enclosed also one from my sister.

Disappointed at not seeing the writing I had expected, I put the packet into my pocket to read when I should be at home. I don't know what instinct led me to do this; I had always before read all letters (except *hers*) under the verandah of the post-office, or in the street.

To-day a hot wind was blowing; the dust rose in blinding clouds; the glare of the road beneath my feet and the fiery sunlight over my head united to scorch and daze me. Altogether I was out of sorts. Sick with the disappointment of hope deferred, I reached home.

A drink of cold tea somewhat refreshed me, and I sat down to read my letters.

What came after I scarcely know; I cannot describe my feelings—in fact, I scarcely did feel. I was stunned—overwhelmed.

It was some time before I could take in the meaning of the writing—at least with my understanding.

Strangely, my heart seemed to apprehend it all, and to have suddenly collapsed, while yet my reason refused to receive anything but a vague dread.

Since then I have recognized in others that same rapid perception of the feelings, so much in advance of the comprehension of the understanding.

A doctor sees much of human nature; unconsciously the heart is bared to him.

The terror of the heart has frequently looked out on me from the *eyes*, while the *lips* framed the expression of cold or cautious reason.

The heart *feels* before the brain *sees*.

It was so with me on that eventful day. At last, however, I took in the meaning of my father's letter.

He was about to change his condition; he trusted I should rejoice in his happiness. Of late years his life had been clouded. My sister's confirmed ill-health rendered her unable to be a companion to him; I had disappointed his hopes. He had resolved to marry again, and had been so happy as to find in our friend and connexion—Caroline Ennis—a partner at once fitted to adorn his home and solace his heart. They were to be married in a month. In fact, when this letter reached me, Caroline would be my step-mother! Caroline Ennis? Was it possible? It could not be! What fiend was torturing me with devilish imaginings?

I flung down the letter; rose, and paced my little room.

Suddenly I staggered, and clutched at the wall for support.

The vertigo passed. I got some water, and dipped my head into it; again I took up the letter. The enclosure from my sister fell out; I had forgotten it in my terrible excitement.

Surely her gentle words would dispel this frightful dream. But no; her words were gentle as ever, and tinged with sadness; but, in the main, they agreed with my father's.

She begged me to accept cordially the proposed change; alluded to her own ill-health, and our father's consequent loneliness; reminded me of his perfect right to please himself; hinted how much more unsuitably he might have chosen; expressed a high opinion of Caroline; and concluded by hoping I would receive her, kindly and respectfully, as our father's wife!

Poor Nelly—a confirmed invalid—the hot breezes of life swept by, and left her untouched. She knew nothing of my feelings; had she known, she could not have comprehended.

Her letter soothed my agitated spirits; it was like a breath of cool air. I sat down and tried to collect my thoughts—to bring my mind to bear on it all. Still the one idea presented itself over and over again—Caroline my mother! my father's wife! It was more than I could bear; my brain reeled under it.

Seizing my hat, I rushed from the house, and plunged into the scrub by the river.

On I walked—on and on—never heeding the burning sun, nor feeling the fiery wind; never noticing the signs premonitory of approaching change.

A flash of lightning startled me; it was followed by a loud peal of thunder. Thoroughly roused, I turned, and faced the cool south wind as it came fresh from the sea.

Presently the rain commenced to fall in torrents; blessed and refreshing change, but dangerous in my excited condition. Lightly clothed, I was soon wet to the skin. Mechanically I made my way home.

Arrived there, wet and weary, I threw myself on my bed; turned my face to the wall, and gave way to my grief. Remember, I was young; it was my first bitter disappointment. Tears would have saved me, had it not been for the drenching I had got.

I suppose over-fatigue induced sleep, for I only recollect a feeling of shame, accompanied by relief, at finding the pillow saturated with my tears.

CHAPTER VI.

Real friends.—Honour bright.—Lady helps.—The first gold.—Full price for any amount!—A digger's wedding.—The gold fever.—Death busy.—The "Nelson" case.

I CAME to myself in a large cool room; the green shutters of its open windows softened the light and admitted the fresh breeze. It seemed as if familiar voices had roused me from a long sleep. Opening my eyes, I perceived Mrs. Raine and Doctor Lay standing at the foot of my bed.

"Ah, you'll do now," said the doctor cheerily, answering my gaze. Mrs. Raine moved away; her kind heart had grown interested in the friendless young man, whose return to consciousness rewarded her care.

The sight of her brought to my memory the evening when we three had watched her boy, hovering between life and death.

"Where's Freddy?" I asked almost unconsciously. Somehow the boy associated himself with the scene.

Mrs. Raine smiled. "He'll come and see you soon," she replied. The moment had been sufficient to restore thought. A sort of nightmare weighed on me; the first waking after a heavy calamity, the ice-grip of a vague dread holding the heart.

Was it a frightful dream, born of sickness and delirium? Would it not disperse with returning health and reason? I suppose the uneasiness within was expressed on my countenance, for Doctor Lay came and leant over me.

"Look here, South," he said, "you must keep yourself quiet; you've been very ill, and you're weaker than you know; but you'll do if you'll only avoid agitation. Don't talk, don't think; give Nature a fair chance."

"One word," I entreated; "tell me how I came here; were there not some letters?"—and the icy hand gripped hard at my heart. My voice trembled as I asked the question.

"We found you down with the fever in your cottage; Mrs. Raine had you brought here, that she might nurse you herself; the least you can do in return for her kindness is to show yourself a docile patient. Youth and a good constitution have pulled you through so far. You know, as well as I do, that now it is a question of time and care."

I made an effort to appear grateful for the kindness lavished on me, feeling all the while as if death would have been a boon.

Again Doctor Lay read me, and remarked, "There's a great deal to do just now; we want you about again. I'm doing your work, so I can't stay. Take this, and try to sleep; I'll look in again to-morrow. If you're better, we'll have a talk."

He held a glass to my lips, and I swallowed the contents. My senses were returning; I recognized the taste, and knew I should soon sleep. That night I slept soundly, and did not wake until late next day.

Mrs. Raine and her husband were sitting in sight of my bed, though in an adjoining room, the door of which was open.

For some minutes I lay still watching them; they were talking earnestly. Presently Freddy opened the door; his mother held up her hand to check his somewhat noisy entrance, pointing in my direction.

"He's awake," cried the boy; "he's looking at me."

The three turned towards me; Mrs. Raine came forward.

"Dear Mrs. Raine, how can I thank you?" I said.

"By getting well, and that quickly."

Mr. Raine now approached, leading Freddy.

"Well, doctor, you've had your turn like the rest of us; but I expect you'll be about directly, dosing other people, eh?"

"Did you like the physic yourself, Doctor South?" inquired Freddy, looking very serious; "honour bright, you know."

"I haven't tasted it, Freddy; but I'll take anything your mother gives me."

"Ah, so did I; but I didn't *like* it, though; now do you?"

"Freddy, you mustn't make Mr. South talk," cried his mother, returning to the room with some refreshment for me. "Run away now; perhaps to-morrow you may come in again."

"Mind you notice how you like the physic, and tell me," whispered the boy, as his father led him away.

Presently Mr. Raine returned with Doctor Lay. He told me how the woman who cleaned my rooms had fetched him to me—she having found me raving in delirium when she came in the morning. The doctor did not tell me, what I afterwards heard, that he watched by me, and cared for me himself at first; then, finding it impossible to procure proper attendance, he took advantage of Mrs. Raine's proposal, and conveyed me to her house.

All this time he was attending my patients, and doing what he could to keep my practice together, though the press of work was great just then.

How much unselfish charity there is in the world, of which it never hears! The doctor was not one whose name headed subscription lists, or whose fussy benevo-

lence stuck up people in the streets, extorting the unwilling donation. Not that he was illiberal in money-gifts; I don't think he ever refused help to any scheme that would benefit others; but it was in the practice of the profession he loved that his philanthropy found its largest scope.

I suppose no profession opens a wider sphere to benevolence than that of a physician; and at the period of which I write, the peculiar circumstances of the colony multiplied the claims of charity. It is universally acknowledged that the medical men in Melbourne responded nobly to these calls. By their kindly help and wise counsel many were assisted, not only through seasons of bodily sickness, but in the agony of bereavement, or the bitterness of disappointment; and none exhibited a more delicate charity than did Doctor Lay.

At an early stage of my convalescence he took an opportunity of returning the letters which he had found by my bed-side. Whether he guessed anything of their contents I do not know, for he never again alluded to them.

I seldom saw him more than once in a week, Mrs. Raine's good nursing being all I now required to help me to complete recovery. I knew that in delirium I must have betrayed something of my secret to her at least, so gently and wisely she set herself to strengthen my wounded spirit; to show me how much remained worth living for; how noble a life might be spent in benefiting others; what enduring happiness springs from well-directed labour. She was not a woman who *talked* much about religion, but she *acted* it. Her life was a poem—devoted, unselfish, brave. She bore up under the privations and difficulties that surrounded her, and found occasions of helping her neighbours.

There were a large number of families in Melbourne then, deserted by their natural protectors; sickness, too, was much increased by overcrowding.

Some of the ladies organized themselves into a benevolent society, for the double purpose of affording sufficient and avoiding indiscriminate relief. Mrs. Raine personally inquired into cases. Often have I seen her carrying food to destitute families, or luxuries for the sick, Freddy trudging along by her side, his arms filled, perhaps, with a loaf or paper parcel—his pockets stuffed with old toys, or lollies for poor children.

A class of immigrants, numerous just then, especially enlisted her sympathy—gentlewomen obliged to labour for a subsistence. Many came to the colony, hoping to obtain higher remuneration for their work. The general disturbance of society rendered it difficult for these to procure suitable engagements. Mrs. Raine took pains to get several of these ladies placed among her friends. In some cases she would receive them into her own house until a fitting home offered. The wise advice and cordial sympathy thus afforded was of incalculable benefit, and preserved to the colony many whose talents and influence proved highly advantageous to the rising generation. These things came under my notice during my convalescence. The high tone of that household had a healthy effect on my mind, and was as beneficial to my spirits as the mistress's nursing was to my body.

It was an exciting time. While I was ill, tidings reached Port Phillip of the gold-find at Bathurst, on the Sydney side, but near our border. A rush immediately set in from all the Australian settlements. The number of persons on the first diggings soon enlarged the area of auriferous ground.

Gold was found in several places almost simultaneously. I do not remember the precise order of discoveries. Some took place during my illness; several afterwards. I have no books of reference at hand to enable me to observe exact order in enumerating. Falling back on memory,

Bendigo, the Ovens, Ballarat, and districts in their vicinity recur to me. In fact, the whole country about the ranges appeared to be auriferous, and many other parts besides.

I remember a great but useless search in Collingwood, and threatenings of burning up the streets of Melbourne to seek the precious metal; but this came afterwards.

In the commencement of the diggings Melbourne was almost deserted; so also the other (then) non-auriferous colonies. The crews of our few vessels ran away. A ship would have to wait months to fill up her complement of hands; indeed, they never did fill them up, but sailed very short-handed more frequently than not. Owners of stores were left to carry on their business alone, and generally ended in shutting up their stores and following their *employés* to the diggings. In the few shops that remained open it was no unusual thing for a customer to be asked to walk behind the counter and select the articles required. As to sending them, that was out of the question. I recollect being in the house of one of our leading lawyers when he returned from his office, triumphantly carrying a leg of mutton for next day's dinner.

Our bank managers stuck to their post, but severally enacted the parts of cashier, accountant, and correspondent for themselves. Old or disabled men were at a premium.

Mr. Raine had one; he was old, but not disabled. He stayed by his work faithfully. While the master was superintendent, clerk, and book-keeper, the man was office-hands, yard-hands, and errand-boy.

It was a peculiarly anxious time, too, for those who ventured to purchase the newly-found gold. This was brought to town by an escort of troopers, deposited at the Treasury, where each person, on producing his receipt, claimed his own parcel of gold; but scarcely any one was

practically acquainted with gold-mining—no one knew the real value of this gold—there was no means of assaying—its purity could not be properly tested.

The banks bought, but at a price which secured them from loss in any case. A few merchants ventured to outbid the banks. Mr. Raine was one; he bought, and bought largely, at a little below the ordinary market value of gold. He ventured his all on this. With difficulty the first gold-ship was half-manned, and sailed with her precious freight.

Hope and fear alternated in many a heart until news could be received of the price Australian gold would command in London. It was a critical time. Fortune or ruin hung in the balance. Mrs. Raine shared her husband's anxieties in business matters as in all else. Had she been an irritable or gloomy woman, his mind would scarcely have kept its even clearness.

All depended now on the price the gold fetched!

Towards sunset one afternoon the chequered flag was run up on the old flagstaff. Eager faces crowded to ask what ship, what date; and when it was known that she could bring news of our gold, people held their breath in suspense. What would they not have given for a telegraph? But so wild a notion never crossed people's minds then. A telegraph line was as little thought of as a railway. Liardit's Beach, off which ships lay, was five miles of bad road; no public vehicles ran between it and Melbourne. William's Town, where ships also lay, was farther still. So we had wearily to wait for letters. Though personally I had no interest in the news this vessel would bring, yet I was sick with suspense. The Raines' interest was mine.

I marvelled at Mrs. Raine—how calm she appeared. I said something of this one evening as we were loitering in the garden, watching for her husband's return from

business. An Australian redbreast was perched on the fence, hopping from rail to rail; its brilliant breast flashed and glittered in the sun's declining rays.

"Is it not lovely?" exclaimed my companion, pointing to the bird. "*He* made it so—*He* cares for it—watches over it."

I knew then what stilled her anxious heart, but *I* could not be still.

I had resumed my work, and taken up my abode in part of a house near my old quarters; but I generally managed, on some pretext or other, to see Mr. or Mrs. Raine during the day. The day the letters were expected I could hardly hide my impatience. I dared not venture to meet my friend in the public street; I could not go to the office; I would not intrude on Mrs. Raine, but I called at the door and took Freddy, as I had before done, on my horse to visit a patient in their neighbourhood. It was all I could think of to help his mother; the child's questions and chatter irritated her nerves, now strained to their utmost tension. By this means I also furnished myself with an excuse for calling at the house on my return. We had made our visit and were coming down by the old cemetery when Freddy called out,—

"There's papa! Why, it's only dinner-time, and he never comes home until evening!"

My heart gave a great bound as I caught sight of Mr. Raine. He was walking rapidly towards his house. I could not see his face, but there was a something in his gait which made my heart leap within me. *That* was not the step of a disappointed man: it was elastic with hope.

Instinctively I hurried forward, but a little consideration led me to slacken our pace. The meeting of husband and wife at such a moment was sacred. No human eye should witness it. I could just see Mrs. Raine's figure

at the verandah door. He cleared the teps at a bound, and drew her within the room.

I threw up my hat and shouted. No doubt it was absurd, but the relief was so great that I could not restrain my joy.

I believe Freddy thought I was crazy.

When we reached the house they were still invisible, but the child's voice disturbed them. Mrs. Raine hurried to her bedroom as her husband opened the door of the sitting-room.

He came forward and held out his hand. Neither of us spoke. He seized the boy, tossed him on to his shoulder, then found his voice.

"Finest quality! Full price for any amount! The fortune of the country's made!"

"And of the merchants too, I hope," said I.

"Thank God!"—and, with a sigh of relief, he threw himself on a chair.

I felt that the little family should be alone on that day, and left the house immediately.

Going down the street, at every corner I encountered groups of men eagerly discussing the news.

Diggers who were in town with fresh gold stood about the doors of public-houses, anxious to "shout" for every passer-by.

Through that and many succeeding days they were to be found lounging about the publics, gushing and jovial, parading the streets with their wives or sweethearts resplendent in gorgeous attire.

Many of these were acquaintances of four-and-twenty hours' date. I recollect calling on a lady about this time, and finding her quite upset. That morning she had sent her servant on an errand; the girl stayed longer than she had expected. On her return the mistress inquired if she had been hindered in executing her commissions.

"No, ma'am, it's all here, and this is the change," handing her some money. "And, if you please, I'm going to be married. Look here what he's gived me!"—and she exhibited a large brooch.

On questioning her, the mistress found she had met a digger that morning. They had mutually "fancied" one another and were to be married next day.

What was his name?

She did not know, only he would call for her next morning; she must go out that afternoon to buy her things—and she showed a ten-pound note he had given her for that purpose.

Instances of this kind were of common occurrence.

These were the palmy days of marriage fees. The few clergymen were well worked and well paid.

The incumbent of the Central Church made good use of the increased income by purchasing a large tent and setting it up at Canvas Town among the immigrants' tents as a school for the children of new arrivals. It was large enough to hold seventy children, and was generally full.

On Sundays a flag was hoisted, bearing the words "Church of England" in large letters, and service was held in the tent on the afternoon of that day. In my professional visits to Canvas Town I had frequent opportunities of witnessing the increasing efforts made by the clergy to lessen some of the evils consequent on the great influx of people to a town quite unprepared to receive them. Walking home one day, I fell in with the parson of the parish, returning also from his work in Canvas Town. On the bridge we were overtaken by a procession of vehicles, from which white ribbons were streaming and noisy men shouting. Several were standing up in the carriage, bottle and glass in hand, supplying drinks to their companions, and offering them to the passers-by.

It was a digger's wedding—a common sight then. White streamers adorned the horses, and depended from the drivers' coats, hats, and whips.

Champagne corks whizzed from within, and the sparkling glass was handed to women and men in turn.

The presiding Gannymede (who I suppose was the bridegroom) caught sight of us.

"Now, doctor, ye'll take a glass, and his riverence 'll do the like. Maybe it'll bring us good luck. *Hold* on there" (to the driver) "while the jintlemen drinks to the leddies!"—and the fellow, half-drunk himself, leant out of the vehicle, holding the glass and bottle towards us. "Now don't ye be shy, my hearties: ye're kindly welcome. I see his riverence is dry. Hold on, I tell ye, while the parson gets his drink!"

A roar of laughter from the other occupants of the carriages, and of hurrahs from the boys who followed the procession, increased our annoyance, especially as we found we were attracting public attention.

We quickened our pace, but our liberal friend had the advantage there. He followed us with remonstrance and entreaty, upbraiding me and fraternizing with my companion.

"Doctor, it's yer fault. The parson, he'd drink. See how he tipped me the wink that moment! Ye're a mane-spirited cur not to stand by yer mate," &c., &c.

I looked about for a policeman, but none was to be seen.

There was nothing for it but to walk on and make for the river-side so soon as we were within jumping distance. Wheels could not follow us there.

This we did; and as we sat on a log to rest and let the procession get out of sight, my companion gave me some curious accounts of the way many of these marriages were arranged. He told me he felt sure he married the same

people many times over, but it was impossible to prove it.

The usual declarations were made, and no one came forward to falsify them. Strange things have come out, in later years, concerning these marriages. For instance: On one occasion two couples presented themselves in the Central Church to be married. The proper forms were gone through; everything appeared quite correct, and the clergyman performed the ceremony. Years afterwards that marriage was found to have been an exchange of partners, the two brides being given away each by her former husband—Mr. A. gave Mrs. A. to Mr. B; Mr. B. gave Mrs. B. to Mr. A.

Persons of this sort were of course quite ready to perjure themselves by making false declarations. The only surprising thing is that they gave themselves the trouble of going through any ceremony.

These diggers from the country helped to swell the already over-crowded numbers in Melbourne. They scattered money with lavish profusion.

The old saying, "Easy come, easy go" was here realized. They would throw down their gold for any object that took their fancy, and with a reckless swagger exclaim,—

"There's plenty more where that came from!"

The "swell's lush," as they called champagne, was largely consumed—not because it was preferred, but because it was expensive.

If the diggers were jolly, so also were the tradespeople. Those who had large stocks on hand made enormous profits, but a great proportion of the money made on the gold-fields fell into the hands of the publicans.

It was no unusual thing for a man to come down from the diggings and place a hundred pounds in the hands of a publican to be "drunk out."

When it was all gone he would return to the diggings, perhaps a sadder, but seldom a wiser man. If he lived, next year would see him again "on the spree," and so on to the end.

It must be remembered that I am speaking here of the first diggers, many of whom were of the criminal class from neighbouring colonies.

Afterwards, when the full tide of immigration set in from Europe, the general character of the gold-seeker improved, and many were wise enough to invest their gains in land, and so provide good homesteads for themselves.

The arrival of these was, however, attended with great suffering and privation.

As I have said, Melbourne was altogether unprepared to receive a large population, as it were, in a moment.

Food of all kinds went up to fabulous prices; imported food was only to be had at famine rates; social conditions were revolutionized.

Master and man, mistress and maid, changed places. Labour was master of the situation, and made the most of its advantages.

We cannot blame labour for this; circumstances had raised it to a premium. It was more to be wondered at that labour could be had at all than that it held itself very independent of its employers. Of course, in many cases it could not be had at any price; when it was possible to procure it at all, at least five times the former rate was demanded.

Then came the rush of immigrants, arriving at the rate of many hundreds per week.

Rents rose in proportion; cottages, which before the discovery of gold could be had for five shillings a week, were now let at sixty shillings. My little cottage of only three rooms, in Collingwood, fetched exactly that

sum per week. Larger houses were eagerly taken at rentals of six and eight hundred per annum.

Numbers of new arrivals could not even find sleeping accommodation, and still they came, till Melbourne, which at the first breaking-out of the gold fever resembled a deserted village, swarmed with an ever-increasing population.

Then came Canvas Town—a street of tents along what is now the St. Hilda Road. And not only here, but on every vacant allotment in Melbourne itself, tents were erected.

Canvas Town is synonymous, in my mind, with low fever, ague, and children's ailments. There was a great deal of sickness and suffering—perhaps none but the medical men and clergy knew how much. But Canvas Town was a necessity of the times, though in the summer it was the hotbed of disease and wretchedness.

Many of the tents were miserably small; in some a man could not stand upright. The sun pouring down on such dwellings made them fearfully oppressive. Low fever swept away its victims with remorseless hand.

One Sunday afternoon I was called to visit some former patients who had gone to live in the North Melbourne bush. Passing the cemetery—then just opened—I observed a crowd of people within, and of vehicles at the gates. Indeed, a stranger approaching might have imagined it some place of amusement, so thronged was the open space. I made my professional call just beyond, and rode back; still the same appearance of bustle within, and vehicles of various sorts about the entrance. It was the first time I had been at this cemetery; I hung up my horse and went in. I found there had been thirty funerals that afternoon, many from Canvas Town.

My attention was drawn to one in particular—a solitary mourner stood by the grave.

As he turned to depart, the officiating clergyman spoke to him. I heard his reply.

"Sir," said he, "one month ago I landed in this country with a wife and four healthy children. I go from this grave *alone!*"

The clergyman seemed to feel as I did, that his was a case beyond the reach of human comfort.

He held the man's hand in his for a moment, then turned away without a word.

Respectable families, accustomed to home comforts, were glad to reside in tents. Many of this class brought tents with them, and pitched them on any vacant spot they could obtain. These spots were generally swampy—there was no attempt at drainage—consequently plenty of work for us doctors.

My journal at this time outlines the work of one day.

Every day was not like this; but it is not an unfair average for the first year of the gold fever:—

"*February 9th.*—H. dead; low fever. Eldest daughter dying of same. Mrs. H., lady, well-bred, five children. Scarcely any means—friendless. Mrs. W., dead. Met Mr. —— in her tent. 'I married her,' said he, 'last week; to-morrow I must bury her.' Visited K.'s place; he came to meet me, stern and grim. 'You needn't come here, doctor, the lad's gone; there's plenty outside waiting for you.'"

So it goes on; and yet there were bright spots in all this gloom—unselfish acts, kindly sympathy, quiet heroism, patient bravery.

The H. family (whose father had died) were good types of these.

Nobly they struggled through their difficulties. The mother took in needlework and gave lessons. I believe she would have taken in washing (which paid well then) if she had been strong enough. She managed to keep

her children together, and to educate them. Soon the elder boys got situations, and helped their mother, pushing forward the younger. All are now at the top of the tree. The fine old lady still lives to see the children she so struggled for in positions of honour and affluence.

This in advance. At the period of which I write, Mrs. H. was one of the earliest to avail herself of the better class of cottages which began to appear when the first excitement was past.

By degrees labour returned to the city; it could command its own price, but it paid capital to employ it.

Warehouses and public buildings commenced to rise on vacant spots; good houses were built; suburbs were formed. Among these, Emerald Hill associates itself with Canvas Town, which may almost be said to have removed thither bodily. Tents disappeared in the latter, as wooden cottages sprang up on the former, and were inhabited often by the same people.

The municipal authorities did all they could to encourage the building of houses, and to get rid of the tents, which not only disfigured but endangered the city.

The risk of fire from a number of tents in a town largely composed of wooden tenements was, of course, great, and their further erection was prohibited, as soon as was at all practicable.

Melbourne was now prosperous—madly prosperous. The people were getting, as a well-known *habitué* of Collins Street said, "disgustingly rich."

Business resumed its bustle with greatly increased activity. Charitable institutions were initiated on all sides. The hospital and benevolent asylum, which existed before, were enlarged and extended.

The nucleus of an orphan asylum on Emerald Hill was formed—for, as usual, society presented at the same

moment extremes of wealth and poverty, prosperity and destitution.

But a liberal public spirit pervaded the city, and private benevolence was not wanting.

Much was done to mitigate the suffering entailed by the great rush and social disorganization attendant on it.

Society was certainly demoralized; a general aspect of lawlessness was apparent even in the streets of Melbourne; still it was surprising—and greatly to the credit of the colony—that there was so little of violence, so little even of public disorder.

The ordeal was a fierce one; and, on the whole, the colonists bore themselves well in passing through it.

Of the acts of violence that did occur, the larger portion were committed by reckless adventurers, attracted to our shores from all parts of the world, especially "expirés" and escaped convicts from the adjacent settlements.

The two most daring outrages committed at this time were the robbery of the gold escort, and that of the ship "Nelson," lying in Hobson's Bay.

The gold escort was a body of armed men established by Government for the safe conveyance of the gold from the diggings to Melbourne. Large quantities were thus brought down. The idea of danger connected with it never occurred to any one.

The escort consisted of an officer and several mounted troopers. On one occasion, as these were proceeding to Melbourne with a large quantity of gold, in passing through a part of the forest they came suddenly upon a barricade formed by trees, felled so as to obstruct the track. As they approached, some shots were fired from an ambush behind the screen of logs.

The escort, dodging behind trees, returned the fire as soon as they perceived the enemy. Several shots were exchanged; but the robbers had all the advantage of

preparation and position, besides being more numerous. Their first fire disabled some of the troopers, and wounded the pack-horses carrying the gold.

After a short resistance, the guard was driven off, and the treasure fell into the hands of the robbers.

The robbery of the "Nelson" was planned with equal skill and daring, and carried out with like determination.

The ship was just ready for sea—in fact, was to sail on the following day. A large quantity of gold had been put on board for conveyance to England, and was securely stored for the voyage.

In the middle watch of the night, when only two men would be on deck, a boat came alongside the vessel. A man ascended the ship's side and made some inquiries of the officer of the watch, engaging him in conversation.

The idea of danger to a ship lying in the bay, surrounded by other vessels, in sight of port, and with her crew on board, occurred to no one. The officer replied to the questions put to him without hesitation or suspicion. Meantime, other men from the boat had quietly reached the deck. The watch were overpowered and gagged to prevent their giving the alarm. The fore-hatches were secured to keep the rest of the crew below. Then some of the robbers descended to the cabins, confined the officers in their berths, and mounted guard over them, while their accomplices deliberately carried off the gold and stowed it in the boat. They then satisfied themselves that the whole ship's company were so secured as to render it impossible for them to give the alarm until some one should come aboard in the morning, and left the vessel. Great was the horror and excitement next day when the robbery became known in Melbourne. Of course, many theories were started, and suspicious rumours floated about concerning the perpetrators; but no clue has ever been found to lead to their discovery.

Through these days of startling incident and abrupt change I went about my professional duties with a weary spirit. My heart was dissatisfied, and daily I grew more and more unsocial and restless.

I felt I must have change, and determined to leave the colony and go to New Zealand as soon as my friends the Raines should have departed.

CHAPTER VII.

Changes.— Sinking funds.— An agitated parting. — Bush-ranging as a tonic for the nerves.

Mr. Raine's courageous enterprise had completely retrieved his fortune. He had found himself in a position to take advantage of the great impetus trade had received, had made the most of his opportunities, and was now about to return with ample means and resume his former position in England. The Raines were the last link that bound me to Melbourne. My bodily health was restored, but I had lost mental activity and buoyancy of spirit. I felt inert, and sometimes terribly depressed.

While I was in this condition, and undecided as to the precise place whither I should go, an offer was made me to take charge of a small hospital on a new diggings, with a fair prospect of outside practice, which was then commonly allowed in the country hospitals.

It would be a change of scene; I had never lived on a diggings; so I arranged to close with this offer and proceed to my new abode the week after the Raines should have sailed.

Talking over my intention with Doctor Lay, he advised me to go, but only for a time.

"Mind," he repeated, "only for a time; don't hang on in the country, vegetating and growing rusty. You're young enough to take a year or so of roughing, and return to us all the better for the change; but don't stay till

you've got into a groove and are too indolent to get out of it again."

It was the last advice my early friend gave me. Often I thought of it when verifying his warning and running lazily year after year in my groove; but I had no inducement to return after his death and the ushering in of the new era in Melbourne annals.

Signs of this change were already apparent. The aspect of society was altered. Before the gold we had been more like fellow-clubsmen than fellow-townsmen. Every one knew every one else. There was a simplicity and friendliness in our intercourse which savoured of patriarchal days.

The kindly superintendent and his wife lived in an unpretending wooden cottage, distinguished by its tasteful arrangement rather than by its grandeur.

The era of "At Homes" had not arrived. Mrs. La Trobe was always visible—accessible to all.

There were few dignitaries in Church or State. Before the bishop's arrival we had a good English clergyman and a genial Roman Catholic priest, who might be seen walking amicably in Collins Street together. When the bishop first came he fell in with our simple ways, and did the work of a parish priest.

Our judge was rather puffy than solemn; our testy Crown prosecutor cracked jokes with "the boys," as his housekeeper called the few lawyers Melbourne then boasted.

The graceful hospitalities of the colonel's house formed a chief attraction of our limited circle.

Ladies were chivalrously deferred to; social intercourse was natural and pleasant; there were no jealousies and few estrangements.

All this was changing now. Strange faces thronged our streets. "Look out for number one" commenced to be a necessary motto.

A governor was coming, with a real live lady of title, to take the reformation of society in hand.

Church dignitaries were springing up, and the bishop must have a suitable residence and surroundings.

More judges were wanted. The bench and the bar grew preternaturally dignified. Officials, military and civil, multiplied.

A shoal of merchants, with wives and daughters on the most fashionable pattern, invaded our shores.

The old aristocracy drew back before the new comers.

To thread your way along the streets became an art; to attend a ball a serious infliction. Our very name was changed. We were no longer Port Phillip settlers, but Victorians, governing ourselves, and—*making a precious mess of it.*

But the greatest change was in myself; it was thence that the real discontent sprung.

My secret hope was gone; the pivot round which my thoughts had centred was broken. There were certain places in the town which I never passed without recalling the old dreams.

I could not go home. No one depended on me; no one wanted me. I would fashion a solitary life for myself, with Nature for my friend. She was always the same; she never disappointed her lovers. I would see Mrs. Raine off, and then turn my face inland. The day came for their departure. I was to take Mrs. Raine and Freddy on board—Mr. Raine, who had some final arrangements to make, coming with the captain later.

There was no pier either at William's Town or Liardit's then. The agents of passenger ships generally employed a small steamer to take passengers and their luggage on board from the wharf in Melbourne. The winding course of the Yarra rendered the voyage down very tedious. As it was calm, Mrs. Raine preferred joining the vessel in a

boat from Liardit's. When we reached the ship we found everything in confusion.

The accommodation-ladder hung in mid-air, completely broken; men on deck were running hither and thither; the officer in charge shouting; two landsmen (known by their dress) gesticulating to a boatman. The crew of the captain's gig were putting off from the ship.

It was some time before I could gain the attention of any one on board; and we hung on and off, tossing among the loose tackle, and scraping the side of the vessel.

Mrs. Raine became very nervous, and would not hear of my scrambling on board and leaving her in the boat. When the gig was fairly away a slight lull ensued, and my stentorian "Ship ahoy!" was at length noticed.

The mate came to our side.

"Am I to take your passengers ashore again?" I asked impatiently.

"An accident has happened; I'm sorry to keep you waiting,"—touching his cap to Mrs. Raine. "We'll rig a chair directly.

Presently a cask, fitted chair-fashion, and covered with a flag, was lowered, and Mrs. Raine and Freddy hoisted aboard. We then heard that, just before our arrival, as they were taking the gold on board, the ladder broke, precipitating the box of gold, then in course of transmission, to the bottom of the bay. The men carrying it got a ducking, but easily scrambled on board; the gold, however, was gone. Great was the dismay and confusion.

The vessel rode at single anchor; her sails hanging, her boats hoisted, ready for sea. The captain was to come on board with his papers that afternoon, and hoped to get away that night. Now what was to be done? The second mate had gone ashore to find the skipper; the chief officer paced the poop gloomily. Below things looked no better; the disorder and discomfort depressed

Mrs. Raine. She begged me to remain on board; together we watched for the boat which should bring her husband: by-and-by it arrived.

"A pretty kettle of fish!" said he, as he reached the deck; "she can't trip her anchor to-night, now; stay and see the end, South."

I was nothing loth, and soon after joined the mate and surgeon in the smoking-room, my friends having retired to their cabin. I found the captain had remained ashore to try to get a diving apparatus, that search might be made for the gold. In the middle of the night he came on board, having made the necessary arrangements.

Early next morning we were all on deck, looking out for the boat which was to bring the diver. Presently the mate lowered his glass and went forward, when the diver drew near. He and three men manned the ship's boat, in order to lie on their oars about the spot where the gold had sunk. The diver descended, and they kept the pump going which supplied him with air.

We waited anxiously for his re-appearance. At last the signal was given, and the helmeted figure rose from the waves. He declared that the box was not to be seen, that it must have sunk into the mud at the bottom, and was irrevocably lost.

All day the search was continued with no better result. The diver adhered to his story, declaring it was useless to look further.

The captain grew savage; the agents for the shippers and insurance company began to dispute as to who should bear the loss; but the old salts were not going to be done. The mate declared his intention of donning the apparatus and going down himself.

"Very well, sir, you'll not find anything," said the diver.

"Any way I'll try," retorted the mate.

"Well, I'm willing to go down once more, only I tell you 'tis no use."

"Don't go," replied the mate; "I've been below before, and I'll do so again."

Seeing he was in earnest, and thoroughly determined, the diver descended again.

In a short time he signalled that he had found the gold, and presently we had the satisfaction of seeing the submerged box safely on board, and securely lodged in the treasure-safe.

The diver received his fee and the promised percentage, though he certainly did not deserve the latter. Evidently he would not have found the gold until we were fairly out of the way, if the mate's firmness had not driven him to do so.

Further delay occurred in arranging about the payment of expenses; but at length all was settled, and the vessel was really to sail.

I had been on board some days, and enjoyed this last opportunity of intercourse with my friends. We were not, however, to part without another agitation.

Mrs. Raine and I were pacing the poop; the boat which would carry me ashore was waiting; the men were aloft doing something to the yards.

We had been remarking on their cat-like agility, when suddenly a cry—a whir through the air—a dark body turned over in it, and fell at our feet.

I don't like even now to think of that mutilated mass, which a moment before had been a living man. The poor fellow was a Dane—one of the best sailors in the vessel. He had no relatives that any one knew of. How the accident happened no one could tell. His companions saw him as he turned in the air—that was the only thing they knew about it.

This was the climax. The captain vowed that, wind or

no wind, he would not remain another night in this ill-omened place.

At sundown the man was buried; and within the hour I was watching the ship as she tacked down Hobson's Bay. What wind there was came from the wrong quarter; but delay would have risked an inquest, and brought more trouble, "which," as the captain said, "would do the poor fellow no good, and themselves a great deal of harm."

Perhaps it was as well that the parting with my friends was hurried at the last. I heard that Mrs. Raine did not recover the shock she had received for some time. The voyage, however, which had begun so unfortunately, proved both agreeable and prosperous.

Returning to town, I at once commenced my preparations for departure. These were soon made, and I went to take leave of Doctor Lay.

"I'm glad for your own sake you're going, South," he said, "but I should be sorry to think you won't come back soon. You want plenty of work; at present there'll be no lack of that, though, at Teb-Teb, for they're trying a quartz country without proper machinery or experience. The slabbing-up will always be giving way, or the miners tumbling down shafts. You'll have what you want—change and work."

"I should recommend a turn at bushranging," put in Woods, who happened to be calling on the doctor that evening; "nothing like that as a tonic for the nerves."

"Have you tried it?" I asked.

"Well, I took a small turn at it last week; and its mighty like wetting one eye—the other's winking for its share now."

"I thought you had something on your mind, Mr. Woods," remarked Doctor Lay gravely; "better make a clean breast of it."

"You heard of our driving a party of ladies to the B. Diggings? As ill-luck would have it, one of the horses cast a shoe and went lame. When we reached Karac I tried to get him shod. Several other horses were waiting, and the man wouldn't look at me for love or money. To get rid of me he said, 'There's another smithy by the roadside, a little further on; maybe you'll get it done there.' Hope revived; but as I turned away I overheard one of the loungers say, 'Tom'll not do it; he'd eight horses waiting all yesterday, while he was shoeing for the troopers, who went off last night on the track of the fellow that stuck up the mail.'

"An idea struck me. I asked Gower to stay by the ladies while I took the lame horse on.

"'What's the use?" said he; 'you heard that man's remarks.'

"But I had the horse out, and put on the saddle we had brought with us.

"'You get some lunch and make yourselves comfortable. I shall bring him back shod—only hand out the barkers.'

"'What! are you going to hold a pistol to the blacksmith's head, and make him shoe that way?' cried Gower. 'You'll find two can play at that game.'

"The ladies began a remonstrance, but I didn't wait to hear it.

"So soon as I was well out of sight I took off my coat, tore my shirt, tied a handkerchief loosely about my throat, hitched up my trowsers to show a belt with the pistols half hidden on one side and a knife sticking out on the other, took a pull at my flask, and went on leisurely, sparing the horse until I rose a hill in front; then I looked down on the smithy.

"There was a bit of thick scrub to the right; I went round by that, so as to approach unnoticed.

"A man and a lad were busy about the forge. A horse,

partly shod, stood near; several others were hung up about the place.

"Having made my observations, I drove the spurs into my horse, and came down on them in full speed.

"'Now, my man,' cried I, throwing myself off, 'shoe at once; I give you ten minutes,'—and I glanced back into the scrub as though my mates were there, or the police on my track.

"The lad looked up terrified, the man hesitated a moment; I took care that the click of a pistol should be heard just then—not threateningly, you understand, only as a reminder.

"'SHOE's the word!' I shouted. 'A minute's more than gold. You'll be glad you've had this chance.'

"The smith, a stolid-looking fellow, never opened his lips, but he did his work, and that quicker than I expected. The horse shod, I jumped on him, threw the man a crown, and disappeared. We reached our destination without further adventure; but on our return, the Karac people warned us to keep a good look-out, 'as D——, the noted bushranger, was known to be in the neighbourhood. The police were scouring the country, but couldn't come on him, though only two days before he had ridden into Tom's smithy, and held a revolver to his head while he shod his horse.'

"'What was his horse like?' asked Gower of the innkeeper who gave us this warning.

"'A splendid brown mare—flies along, they *do* say, and makes nothing o' fences or gullies.'

"'Ah, I see,' replied Gower, dryly, eyeing our tired bay horse, who looked more like crawling than flying. 'Well, we'll be on our guard.'"

We had a hearty laugh over Wood's escapade, and I soon after took my leave.

The next day I left Melbourne, and set out on my journey to Teb-Teb.

I was to accompany the escort as far as it went; it would not turn off the Teb-Teb line until we were within easy reach of the place. We travelled quickly—that is as quickly as the roads would allow. Roads, in fact, they were not—only bush-tracks. In some part of the hills we came on a clayey soil, full of holes, into which our horses would sink up to their knees. I noticed a marked difference of temperature. When we were about eighteen hundred feet above Melbourne, the cold wind whistled round us, and, though it was the commencement of summer, the horses could with difficulty be induced to face the fierce hail-storms we encountered.

Entering among the ranges, detached round hills on all sides afforded a shelter. In the forests between grew enormous trees, producing excellent timber: generally a noisy creek, rattling over boulders, would remind us of the necessity of keeping the track, lest we should miss the crossing-place.

These creeks wind in a most extraordinary way. You come on to the creek and cross it, ascending the rocky hill opposite. Travelling perhaps some miles across country, you imagine that the creek is left far behind; but no, there it is in front of you again, zigzagging backwards and forwards, and turning up where you least expect. I have crossed a creek of this description seven times while making a straight course of about ten miles.

I remember on this journey standing on a peninsula of very high land, about a dozen yards across, and watching the meandering of the creeks, at least a hundred yards.

While on the more frequented tracks, we overtook several drays—some with women and children perched on the top—all having the inevitable tin pannikins and billies hanging underneath.

Men with blankets strapped over their shoulders, and still carrying the billy, travelled in companies—some on foot, some on horseback—all journeying to the diggings.

The peculiar circumstances of one of these wayfarers impressed him on my memory.

He was nearly blind; his dog was harnessed to a little cart containing a few necessaries; he held the dog by a string, and so kept the track.

We were camped when he came up to us.

"Holloa, mate!" cried one of the troopers, "what do *you* expect to do at the diggings?"

"I can't dig," he replied; "but I can cook a little and I can play the accordion. I'm told victuals and music both fetch a good price up yonder. Anyhow, it's better than loafing in the Benevolent Asylum just yet;" and he trudged on.

At intervals we came on to clearings in the forest, where shanties had been erected as shelters for travellers.

Still we ascended, up, up, until we found ourselves on a portion of the dividing range—a long line of mountains clothed with large trees, stretching away from west to east. Many of the peaks are of quartz, interspersed with a species of pudding-stone. Pipe-clay and ironstone intermingle in the face of the cliffs. On some of the shea-oak hills we picked up large pieces of lava among the trap-rock.

Where quartz or pipe-clay is the prevailing element, gums and peppermints abound; in lava or trap-rock, shea-oaks.

In early spring and in autumn, the forest glades are bright with colour, the heaths forming an exquisitely variegated carpet. Miles of this country are then aglow with crimson and violet heaths, relieved by a delicate white trailing plant. At the time I first passed through these ranges, the luxuriance and beauty of the wild

flowers was a thing to remember. So also was the silent majesty of these vast forests, broken now and then by the chattering of a flock of parrots, or the screech of the cockatoo, as, disturbed by man's invasion of their ancient solitude, they flew past, the gay sheen of their brilliant plumage dancing in the sunlight. The miner bird (now so common) was then more rarely seen here.

We had left the beaten track, and penetrated deeper into the forest; it was pleasanter to travel thus among nodding trees and gorgeous flowers, watching the air quiver in the open glades, and the impervious shade, close in beyond. The land seemed to lie under the spell of silence; our horses' feet, crushing the dry bark and fallen branches, was the only continuous sound in this charmed stillness, till towards evening the weird cry of the laughing jackass would echo among the hills—a tricksome spirit, mocking the turmoil men made over treasure-stones, hidden in gorge and glen, the familiar haunts of his tribe.

Towards the end of our journey I parted from my companions.

My way lay over the ridge, a few miles on the north side. We had been latterly travelling almost entirely through a quartz country, then part of a run, but being rapidly encroached on by diggers. A large English company was about commencing regular mining there.

That company has now worked the ground more than twenty years, and still finds the mine yield fair interest, —not on the original principal, which has been long since repaid in gold, but on the present value of the shares.

Another systematically-worked mine is near, which half-ruined impatient shareholders at first, but has since amply rewarded the patience of those who waited, and kept their confidence in it.

When I first crossed this country the wildest imaginings would never have conceived the extent of the

operations which, in a few years, would be carried on there, though they were indicated even then by an engineer of long experience in South American mines, who regarded this portion of the range as likely to turn out one of the most permanent gold-fields in Victoria.

His foresight has been verified; for, though not the chief, it is one of the most steadily yielding of the gold districts.

The shaft of one of these mines is now sunk 1000 feet, and payable quartz raised.

From hence I proceeded eastward over the dividing range towards the new rush.

Not being quite certain of my way, I ascended one of the many elevations with which the whole country is dotted, and looked down on a scene which the force of contrast has since imprinted on my memory. Though not the place to which I was then going, it has since been my home for many years, and during those years it has completely changed.

Looking out on its changed aspect, I have continually recurred to the picture it first presented to my eyes; every detail of that lovely solitude has fixed itself in my mind, as I have said, by the almost grotesque contrast of its present appearance.

From the ragged peak on which I stood, I gazed down into a valley, or rather basin among the hills, not unlike a huge shallow crater.

Green, round elevations, evidently of volcanic origin, encircled it; pieces of lava lay about, porous as sponge; one could toss an enormous mass as easily as a ball. I have since regarded these hills as old craters; the tops having fallen in gradually, the sides have got worn smooth, filled up, and covered with soil.

The undulating basin which these hills enclosed was a

series of alternate rises and depressions, suggestive of slighter upheaval.

Light, feathery trees, the prickly acacia, gums, and, *rarely*, the cherry and bottle-brush honeysuckle, flourished in wild beauty.

A winding stream rushed noisily over large, round stones, threading its serpentine way as far as the eye could reach, now dancing in the light, anon losing itself behind the rises, to reappear in the distance, its course marked by the exceeding luxuriance of the foliage which grew on its banks, and by the sheen of its waters, occasionally visible through the trees.

This stream was not yellow and muddy *then*, as it is *now;* but fresh and clear, overhung by the interlacing branches of the trees, which, in the distance, presented the appearance of arches, through which you gazed on the broad stretch of green beyond.

That green! I have never seen anything to compare with it. I wonder whether it *really* was so emerald-like, or whether its dazzling brilliancy is a reflection of my own imagination?

Shut up (as I had been) in the dusty town, occupied much in the more squalid parts, where sight and sense were continually offended—my body scarce restored to its usual strength, my spirits depressed by disappointment—I was in a condition to appreciate to the utmost Nature's freshness and purity.

The invigorating air of the mountains, the aromatic scent of the gums, the wealth of beauty that lay around me—these filled my soul with an intoxicating delight. I bared my head, and stretched forth my arms to receive and hold the great mother's gifts.

My heart seemed to cast off the weight that oppressed it, my limbs grew elastic, Fancy awoke to throw her golden glamour over the scene. I thought I beheld a

vision of the old primeval world vouchsafed to stereotype —in *one* human heart—the virgin loveliness of Nature ere her veil was rudely thrust aside by rough hands, eager to grasp the treasures she hid within her bosom.

I longed to pitch my tent in this fairy-land, far from the turmoil man makes wherever he appears.

Afterwards, circumstances led me to settle here; but it was in the train of a new rush, when thousands of hurrying feet trod this solitude, and busy hands upturned the green turf, leaving a bare and barren desert behind.

There is no room for Fancy here now—the mystery of Nature is laid bare—daylight shines into the very bed of one of her ancient rivers.

The smooth surface of the soil disturbed, the searcher for gold comes on clay and blue stone (lava) mixed, then on pipe-clay and sand-stone—the latter frequently on edge; then gravel is reached, called a lead. This is a distinctly-marked, ancient river-bed; here the gold is found; alluvial, therefore, and soon worked out.

The lead of gravel winds down among the hills, precisely like a river. One can trace how this ancient stream ran, until some violent interruption occurs—a rent or fault, which destroys the lead.

The further search for it is *often* futile, *sometimes* successful. The *sometimes* induces men to spend money and time trying the ground in all directions, tunnelling, sinking, boring, in hopes of finding the lost lead.

I am not a geologist or scientific man (as everybody who reads this book will perceive), and I should not have ventured *beneath* the surface of the ground, except as an excuse for a fanciful question.

Standing on the spot whence I made my first acquaintance with Mial, and regarding its changed aspect, I am tempted to ask, "Did I see a vision of the past?

Was it a picture of the ancient river, in the full flush of its new-born glory that I beheld?"

If you, my reader, saw the place at the present moment, you would understand the dream-like feeling that comes over me when I recall my first glimpse of it.

I lost myself in gazing, as I have again done in recalling it. Not till the shadows gathered about me did I remember that this could not be Teb-Teb.

Here was no sign of human habitation, much less of diggings and hospital, whither I was bound.

Behind me was the top of the range, on the other side of which I and my companions had parted. I perceived I must have come too far to the right.

Retracing my steps, I turned into a glade where many tracks appeared. Following these some distance, I found they led round another rise.

Fastening my tired horse to a stump, I ascended it, and looked down on a number of tents, iron buildings of some pretension, and a few wooden shanties.

This, then, was Teb-Teb.

CHAPTER VIII.

Evening at the diggings.—Camp life.—"Died like a dog."—A good Samaritan.—"The first who moves I shoot dead!"—Sumptuously lodged.—Wattie again.—"Feast time" and "fast time."—A consultation with Nero.

I WAS soon settled in my new quarters. The medicine-man is always welcome among barbarians, and we, on those early diggings, lived much as barbarians.

Bodily wants are imperious, whether in sickness or in health. Bodily gratifications and bodily privations make themselves felt. Anything that helps this clamorous self is acceptable.

In Teb-Teb, at that period, there was little to remind us that we were anything but body.

And yet there were *some* things. Music was, I think, one of them.

When I got into a speculative mood, I could perceive imagination at work, where, on the surface, only greed of gold was visible. This very eagerness for gold is itself an outcome of imagination. The digger *imagined* the pleasures gold would buy him; he would do this and the other; he lived in a kind of material fairy-land. Doubtless it was imagination misused, for, when the dream was realized, the distant fairy-land too often turned into the coarsest sensual orgy, and the possessor of the divine gift degraded himself beneath the level of the brutes.

Still there was *that* in him that I cannot believe

ages of "natural selection," centuries of "favourable circumstances," would ever *develope*.

I'm not a philosopher, and in Teb-Teb days Darwin had not been heard of; but I had read Plato, and was not unacquainted with Eastern literature. Somehow, old myths would crop up in my memory as I lazily smoked my pipe of an evening, listening to the sounds which issued from the tents around me.

Cigars were contemptible, which was a merciful dispensation, as they were not to be had.

"Evening at the diggings" was not without its suggestiveness to an observer of men in those primitive days.

A mingled odour of tobacco and cooked meats hung about; the sounds of accordion, fiddle, and flute floated in the air; occasionally the sound of voices in angry altercation or obscene expletives drowned all else.

There was a group of tents in a hollow among some peppermint-trees, to which the almost blind man was cook in general. There was less rowdyism among these. Whether it was the constant presence of bodily infirmity, the low sweet music with which the sufferer soothed it, or the patient faithfulness of his brute companion, I never could decide; but certainly these tents were the most orderly portion of the diggings. After supper the old man would sit at the tent door with his accordion, accompanying one of his mates who had a peculiarly mellow voice.

A favourite song of theirs was one now, I suppose, obsolete, but, as its refrain rung out in the still air, I used to think it very touching:—

> "Absence makes the heart grow fonder;
> Isle of beauty, fare thee well!"

The singer was said to be a viscount's son. He never said so himself, but went by the name of Hill.

I fancy he was a sort of refined merchant's clerk. My

experience of lords' sons, when they take to the diggings, is that they are more brutish and greater drunkards than other people, which, indeed is to be expected, seeing that only the "ne'er-do-wells" of noble families usually appear on this scene.

Then there was another favourite—"Ben Bolt," "Sweet Alice lies under the stone, Ben Bolt," would be given with a pathos which drew my heart towards the singer as a brother in disappointment.

The old home ballads sounded strangely on the mountain ridges of these southern seas, from the lips of wild men, amid the rudest surroundings and coarsest experiences; yet the familiar airs touched a link somewhere in the chain that binds humanity together. Sweetly they floated on the warm night air, touching rugged hearts, softening rough lives.

Listening and wondering, I said to myself, "This is *memory* tinctured by imagination, coming as a calmer of the soul after the day's work of feverish hope, tinctured also by imagination."

Presently the noise of drunken altercation overpowered all other sounds. Oaths and curses quickly dispelled my dreamy mood. I strolled towards the grog-tent. Two men were struggling in the opening. One of them attempted to draw his knife, but his arm was held by the master of the tent.

"No, no, mates," he cried, "the troopers are not so far off as to make that safe. Fight it out in the bush if you like,"—and he pushed them both through the opening.

He who had tried to use his knife fell forward, overbalanced by the push, tumbling against a stump.

"Remember the dam!" cried a voice from within.

The landlord stepped up to the fallen man, raised and set him against the stump, saying,—

"He'll do; let him sleep it off."

His opponent staggered back to the tent. I looked in, wondering if imagination had any place *there*.

The tent was full of men. A long board, resting on logs fastened together by temporary supports, extended down the middle, with benches of a like description on either side. Black bottles, stone jars, cups, and pannikins covered the board. Representatives of many nations sat round. There was the stolid Englishman and the excitable Irishman, the shrewd Scot and the heavy-featured German, the gesticulating Frenchman and the drawling Yankee, together with sinister-looking old hags from the neighbouring colonies.

All the faces were more or less flushed. Bloodshot eyes, haggard eyes, stupid eyes, cunning eyes looked out from beneath the ship-lamp which hung over the table. Greasy cards lay about. Some were playing with them, others throwing broken dice.

In one corner two men, in the gushing stage, were ostentatiously fraternizing with each other. In the opposite corner more quarrelling was going on.

A pair of wistful eyes gazed from the opening. I recognized the landlord's assistant, a lame lad, who had injured his spine in a drunken fit. Unable now for hard work, yet still craving the poison-cup, he took service in the grog-tent, where he had alternate fits of drunkenness and sobriety.

Wattie was always drunk from Christmas to mid-winter; then he took a turn, heroically refused to spend a farthing of his wages in drink. At any cost of privation or suffering to himself, he hoarded, and, towards the end of winter, disappeared for a few days, returning to indulge in the wildest carnival until his Lenten season came round again. On this particular night his bloated face proclaimed the habitual drunkard; still his eyes retained the wistful, unsatisfied look—significant expression of the better

nature—all but smothered in sensual indulgence. He came outside and stood still a moment, removing his dirty cabbage-tree hat, and baring his head to the fresh breeze. He was at least half sober.

The wistful gaze attracted me. I moved out of the shadow and spoke,—

"Still here, Wattie? It's a bad place for you."

"Ah, doctor, what else can I do? Have it I must, and I can't dig to buy it like the others."

"You're not strong enough for a drunkard, Wattie, as I've told you before. You'll kill yourself."

"'Tis no use talking," said he angrily—and the wistful expression went out of his eyes, leaving them wild and fierce.

Turning away, I nearly fell over the man who lay sleeping against the stump. I tried to rouse him, but in vain, and called to Wattie to look after Martin before they closed up. Afterwards, Wattie said he went to seek him, but, finding him gone, concluded he had awakened, comparatively sober, and returned to his hut in the forest.

I was roused very early next morning and hurried away to the banks of a large dam which had been made to store the winter supply of water for summer use. The man lay dead on the bank. The tents among the peppermint-trees were near this dam. Their occupants had been disturbed about daylight by the howling of a dog. At first they took no notice; but the blind cook's dog, taking up the melancholy strain, became so uneasy that his master got up; the others did the same. Going to the dam, they found Martin's dog—a fine Newfoundland, the only one on these diggings—tugging at something that looked like a man's coat-sleeve, and lifting up his voice to howl between each useless effort. Descending the bank, they came on the dead man, entangled among some old roots and rank vegetation, lying face downwards. Probably he had been trying to grope his way to his hut, missed his footing, and

fallen into the dam. Had he been sober he might have easily scrambled out. As it was, he appeared to have been partially stunned by the fall, to have lain still and have been suffocated.

Such accidents were too common to attract much notice; the dog seemed the only creature who cared about it: his distress was touching. He had been observed prowling round the grog-tent the previous evening, waiting for his master, who had ordered him home to look after the hut before the quarrel commenced. The animal knew what was required of him, and went off; he must have returned later, and tracked his master to the dam. Now he would not suffer any one to touch the body.

When I arrived, he recognized me, and seemed pacified. I had been attending Martin, who had got hurt in a drunken squabble awhile before, and the dog was accustomed to see me handle his master. He allowed me to raise his head, and, with the help of the others, to remove the body, himself following close at our heels.

The inquest was soon over, verdict given "Accidentally drowned," and the troopers buried Martin that afternoon.

It was the end of many for whom loving lips prayed, and anxious hearts watched in the old home.

"Died like a dog," thought I, and fell to wondering whether the dog was not the more rational animal of the two.

Nero was lying with his nose between his great paws; but with open eyes fixed inquiringly on me, as if he also were cogitating the strange embroglio of mundane affairs.

Surely there was a human look in his eyes, as though he, too, had a part.

Was there a latent truth in the old stories of transmigration? Had he once been an easy-going, lazy fellow, "only his own enemy," as people say? Was he, for his sins, now condemned to the body of a beast? Would

he ever develope imagination, and become a drunkard—or a poet?

I rose and stretched myself.

"It's no use dreaming or puzzling over it, old fellow," said I; "let's be chums, and make the best of things. What d'ye say? Is it a bargain?"

Nero rose gravely, and put up his paw.

I accepted it as ratifying the compact, and from that night Nero has been my friend and companion.

But life on the gold-fields was not wholly wild. There were instances of industrious, steady men, who made large sums, and had sense enough to keep what they made. These generally bought land in agricultural districts, and ultimately settled on it.

Some of our largest farmers and landowners acquired the means of making their first purchases in this way.

Instances also of kindness and generosity were not unknown. The hospitals, benevolent asylums, and churches, which soon sprung up on the gold-fields, are proofs of this.

Indeed, it is surprising that there was not more disorder and crime, since the population on the first diggings was largely composed of runaway prisoners from adjacent settlements, deserters from ships, gamblers, and criminals from various nations.

The life they were compelled to lead was not conducive to social improvement, far from the influences of civilization, following a pursuit which keeps the mind in a condition of habitual excitement, recklessly hazarding all on the chance of the morrow. It was a state of things which could not last long; while it did continue, it offered many illustrations of the extremes of human character, in vice and in virtue, and of the singular mixture of both sometimes in the same individual. It is when artificial restraints are so withdrawn, and accustomed habits

broken through, that the real man appears, and one gets to understand that the step between the angel and the devil is not, after all, so very great.

I may mention an instance which did not actually occur here; but in a more settled part, and in later times.

It is as follows:—Proceeding on one of his periodical expeditions, at some distance from Teb-Teb, Wattie managed to stumble against an old root; the shock affected his injured spine, as a slight hurt sometimes will affect a weak part much more than a severe one does. It was towards evening, faint and lame, he sat down under a tree to recover strength for the journey to the next township. His food and drink were exhausted; he hoped to reach the township before night, and replenish his store of provisions. The pain he suffered made him thirsty; no water was to be seen.

"I felt," said he, "as if I must die. I would have given a pound out of the twenty I had with me for a good drink—even of cold water. I tried to crawl into the bush, looking for some: the movement made me faint; I lay back against the tree and remembered no more, till a cool breeze and a delightful moisture on my head roused me. I looked up, and found myself on the grass by a small creek. A tall, well-made, jolly-looking man stood over me; he was pouring water on my head; when I opened my eyes he smiled, and held a flask to my lips.

"'Drink, my lad,' he said, 'twill do you good.'

"After awhile I was able to tell him how I had hurt myself. I felt rested and refreshed, and thought I would go on. 'Stay the night with me,' he said, 'I've a tolerable camping-place behind here, and enough supper for us both.'

"I hesitated, and told him I must get to the township

next day, in order to send a particular letter to my old mother at home."

There was a regular mail between Melbourne and this township. At Teb-Teb we were not so far advanced. The stranger questioned Wattie as to whether it was the down or up mail he wanted to send by, and, hearing it was the former, told him there would be plenty of time to-morrow, as he happened to have heard the mail would leave later that day; so Wattie was only too glad to avail himself of the stranger's kindness. As he helped him towards the camping-place, a little dell, formed by a bend of the creek, thickly timbered—he told how he had found him insensible, and carried him to the water's side; and how he once had a young brother who was lame, and whom he used to carry on his shoulders.

"Is he with you?" asked Wattie.

"With me—how dare you?" said the man fiercely; then recovering himself, "nay, he's dead long ago."

While talking, he had lit a small fire in the hole of a rock; when the billy boiled, he carefully extinguished this, and they sat by the creek, enjoying their evening meal.

Rest and food soon restored Wattie; his host's brandy, I fancy, opened his lips, and he told how he had some months' wages stored in his breast pocket to send to his old mother in Scotland.

The man appeared disturbed.

"Do many lads send money to the old people at home that way?" he inquired.

"I don't know any," answered Wattie.

"Ah, I expect most of them up here sell their gold and take it out in drink. It's the innkeeper's gold or the storekeeper's that gets sent down. I think we'd better turn in," he added.

Wattie slept soundly.

At daybreak his host awakened him.

"Are you able to travel?"

"Oh yes," replied Wattie, getting up and shaking himself to make sure he was awake.

"Have a bath and come to breakfast. I'll lend you my horse a short cut through the bush."

They breakfasted hastily, and the stranger walked by Wattie's side a few miles, leading the horse which Wattie rode.

They neared a steep path, going zigzag down a precipitous descent. Standing at the head of the path, they looked down into a gorge, so narrow at the bottom that a man hidden in the scrub might hold a pistol close to the face of a traveller through the gap without appearing himself.

Wattie's friend pointed to a narrow track across this gorge, telling him to follow it, saying his way lay farther up this side. Wattie proceeded to his destination. He found his unknown friend had been rightly informed concerning the movements of that day's mail.

It was long past the usual hour when it appeared, drawn by two horses only, and presenting altogether an unusual appearance. The coach and travellers were indeed uninjured, but two horses were missing, and all the mails.

The weary horses who dragged the coach up the steep hill hung their heads, and looked as terrified as their living cargo.

At the bottom of the gorge the coach had been brought up short by two heavy logs rolled across the narrow gap. Before the driver could dismount, he and his three passengers were covered by a revolver presented by a determined-looking man, who ordered them to give up the bags. Resistance was useless. The smallest movement was dangerous.

"The first who moves I shoot dead!" said the robber. "I warn you; it's you're own fault if you're killed;" and

he held the revolver so that one of the passengers—a nervous man—thought it would certainly go off of its own accord. However, it did not. When he had possession of the mails, the robber demanded and received their money. He then ordered the coachman to get down and cut the horses adrift; after that he retired into the bush, still holding the revolver towards them. It was not until he had been gone some time that one of the travellers summoned courage to dismount and cautiously peer among the trees. Finding no trace of the enemy, the others ventured, and after a while caught two of the horses, and, patching up the harness, proceeded on their way.

It was well known who the bushranger was, and, when he was afterwards taken, Wattie made a journey to the town in order to see his friend and entertainer, whose fate he always bewailed. I believe, indeed, he would have helped him to regain his liberty, had that been any way possible. Wattie had seen only the angel side of this character; he refused to believe in its opposite, which was only too patent to the general public.

Soon, however, even on the gold-fields, Society resumed her decorous veil. A more respectable class of diggers appeared on the scene, and regular miners were brought out by the great companies. Gold-digging became a settled occupation. Roads were made, and communication opened with the larger towns. Trade flourished; large tracks of agricultural land were brought under cultivation; not only the necessaries but the comforts of civilized life were procurable. Magistrates and police, churches and schools, appeared. The face of things completely changed. The respectable, orderly digger of to-day, who in his uniform of yellow goes regularly, morning and evening, to his work, armed with the peaceful pickaxe and spade, is not to be confounded with his wild proto-

type of the flaming jumper, bowie-knife, and pistol. As I said of the city, so also I say of the country,—Let no one confound the Melbourne or the diggings of twenty years ago with the Melbourne or gold-fields of the present time.

As yet, however, I am in the pre-civilized period. My residence at Teb-Teb did not last very long; the gold was alluvial, and soon worked out.

Men went prospecting hither and thither about the district; there were reports of rich discoveries on a neighbouring creek—*my* creek—the sparkling dream-river I had gazed on the day of my arrival. I might well call it my "dream-river," it was already so changed, and it has grown uglier and uglier year by year ever since.

I was reading the other day of a future Utopian age, when vulgar wealth shall be despised, and men shall nourish their bodies on essences, and their minds on the beautiful. I wonder whether in such an era *my* creek could ever regain its lost loveliness.

Meanwhile, it is dirty, bare, and—*useful*. Large nuggets have been found on its banks; the gravel of the flat through which it runs was richly impregnated with gold.

A rush, of course, set in. Teb-Teb was deserted. Mial became the great diggings.

Nero and I followed the rush and migrated hither. I set up my tent on the side of the hill which hides the creek from view. In a short time I was able to get an iron building, originally a store at Teb-Teb. This I divided into two rooms, using one as my surgery, the other as my eating and sleeping apartment. Nero had his rug in a corner of the latter. When we got a wattle-and-dab chimney put up, and could make a fire on frosty nights in winter, we considered ourselves sumptuously lodged.

I have become accustomed to the altered appearance of the place. Puddling-machines, water-wheels, tin dishes, and cradles have stirred my creek to the consistence of pea-soup. The undulating rises which surged along its green banks are replaced by enormous heaps of gravel of various sizes and shapes, or slushy crossing-places, with bridges made of logs. Here and there it is dammed up, and the water becomes yellower and thicker than ever.

The gently-heaving plain now resembles an open graveyard. Square holes, round holes, and deep holes honeycomb it. Shafts have been sunk in the hills, and tunnels driven through them.

Gallows-like machinery stands out ominously against the sky—pulleys and ropes, suggestive of instruments of torture. The sound of the crushing-machine and the boom of the quartz-blast have succeeded to the thrilling silence of the forest. The gaily-plumed parrot no longer flits in the sunlight; the silvery cockatoo no longer perches amid the green foliage. We have in their stead clouds of blinding dust, raised by a hundred bullock-drays, and volumes of smoke pouring from the iron chimneys of the crushing-engine. So my river exists only in memory; and this is how I have come to fancy it the vision of a younger, fairer world.

After all, however, we have substantial advantages in the place of lost beauty—conveniences and luxuries which were altogether out of reach in the old days. But these did not come all at once; not indeed until the palmy period of lucky finds was over.

In looking back, one is surprised at the improvements in our way of living; and yet they have come so gradually that it is impossible to trace their progress.

But I am getting in advance of my story.

It was in the early times of the Mial rush that I engaged a young fellow, who had some knowledge of

surgery, to live at the Teb-Teb Hospital, in my place. I went over twice a week, oftener when necessary.

We were generally full. Accidents from drunkenness, carelessness, or bad machinery were frequent. My hands were full; and I was glad when another medical man came on the ground.

One day Doctor Wynn came to me, and in the course of conversation he remarked, "There's a poor fellow ill on the other side of the mount; he's always asking for you. He's past doing much for, but you might come over—'twould satisfy him."

I could not go over just then; but a few evenings after, being in that direction, I went on to the place Wynn had mentioned. It was a long shanty—something between a public-house and a shelter-shed.

Here I found Wattie lying on some rugs in a lean-to at the back. A tallow candle, stuck in a bottle, was standing on an old porter-case by his side; it flickered and dripped as the wind blew in through many openings between the boards.

The sick man had his eyes closed; his parched lips kept parting and meeting with incessant motion, but no sound came from them.

When I spoke he looked vacantly at me for a moment, then asked, "Is that you, Doctor South? or am I dreaming again?" I went near and took his hand; it was dry and burning—the pulse going at about 140.

"It's no use," he said; "I didn't send for you for *that*. I want to speak to you; you've always had a kind word for me. Will you do a last kindness for me after I'm gone?"

"Stop a bit, Wattie; let's try if we can't keep you first."

"Promise," he entreated.

"I promise. Now let me have a good look at you."

"Give me a drink; I want to tell you now,"—and he pointed to a mug near.

I saw there was cold tea in the mug, black and bitter, such as one gets on board ship, or roughing it in the bush.

"This is not fit for you," I said. "I'll get you something."

"No, no, give me the tea; the thick water makes me sick."

"I shall get you something better,"—and I went to the door.

"Stop!" he almost shouted, "I can't have it; I'd rather die. Take this, while I've strength to refuse to spend it; promise that you'll not give it back to me, or any one else, but her it's meant for;" and, putting his hand under his shirt, he drew forth an old leather bag, which he held towards me.

The effort was too much for him; he sank back; his eyes closed, but his lips moved with the restless motion I had noticed before. Still he clutched the bag tightly.

I went near to take it from him. He opened his eyes, and motioned me to hide it in my bosom. When I had done so he seemed satisfied; presently he whispered, "Wait a minute; I shall tell you."

"Listen, Wattie," I said in a determined manner. "I will take care of this, and do what you wish; but you also must do as I wish; you must begin by taking what I order."

His lips moved, but no sound came; he looked at the mug, still on the box, so wistfully, that I held it for a moment to his lips.

"Now, Wattie, I'll keep my part of the bargain if you'll keep yours."

"I want to tell you," he again whispered.

"Not till you've taken what I shall get for you."

"It's no use; I've no money; and I *won't* have it, I tell you!" He spoke in a stronger voice than I had thought possible.

"Very well, Wattie," I said firmly; "then I shall return your bag."

But he had exerted himself too much, and now lay back fainting. I went to the front room and asked the landlord, who was a stranger, for brandy and cold water.

"Poor fellow!" he said; "he'll take nothing, though he's dying for it. I offered him a drink to-day, but he bade me get away and not tempt him."

I was surprised to hear this of drunken Wattie.

Returning to him, I bathed his hands and face, and moistened his lips. The landlord helped, and kept talking in a low voice.

He told me that Wattie had taken service with him, after a drunken bout, last autumn; his health seemed much broken; but he did his work, never allowing himself to touch liquor, taking his wages every week; but "what he does with it I don't know," added the master; "he says he hasn't a shilling of his own; he's not been able to work these five weeks."

As he spoke, Wattie opened his eyes; a frightened look came into them; he put out his hand to me.

I put the glass to his lips, and forced him to swallow some of its contents.

"Now, Wattie, be quiet; you're in my charge. I've nobody but Nero to care for, and he won't grudge what I give to you."

"Remember," I continued, turning to the landlord, "I am responsible for what I order; just send some one to sit here half an hour, while I am gone."

Wattie lay stupid and dozing. The stimulant had more effect than I expected; he was so weak.

When I returned I had no difficulty in making him take what I brought with me.

Soon he slept; and, as I watched, I tried to recall what I knew of the sleeper.

I had seen nothing of him for a long time; the excitement of the new rush, my change of abode and continual occupation, had fully engrossed me. I never thought of Wattie. I had heard that he was gone to another goldfield, with the keeper of the Teb-Teb grog-tent—that was all I knew about him.

I now recollected how it used to be said of him that he was mad-drunk one half the year, and stupid-sober the other half. His mates would jeer him about his "feast time" and "fast time." I had not then heard the story of his confidence to his bushranging entertainer; so I puzzled over those peculiarities, having no clue to the motives which were strong enough to keep him sober half the year, when it was plain that the demon drink had him a willing captive.

"Was it necessity or whim that prompted his periodical self-denial?" I asked myself, as I felt the leathern bag he had given me. It surely contained money—indeed he said so, and something about *her*. Could he be married? I did not think it likely.

As I sat cogitating, a man came in, whom I recognized as one of the Teb-Teb diggers; he told me he was working in one of the Mial claims now, and had looked in to see how Wattie was. "Poor fellow!" said he; "it's not much he wants now, nor for long I reckon; but I'm glad you've come, doctor; he's been wearying to see you."

This man repeated what the landlord had already told me, adding, "You remember, doctor, Wattie was always queer. He had his 'feast time' and his 'fast time.' If you were to kill him for it, he'd never touch a drop till the time came round; treating was no go either. He told

me he daren't trust himself. As regular as the month came round he'd go to the big township, sober and sad, we used to say; then he'd come back, work like blazes, and drink like double-blazes, till fast-time came again; but every year I noticed the fast told on him more and more; he seemed to crave and crave, but he'd die rather than touch it. And, doctor," said the man, coming nearer and speaking in a sort of awed voice, "I once met him in the township, and I know he'd sent away all his wages. I've heard tell of Roman Catholics that REALLY DO fast. D'ye think he is one, and sends his money to the Pope at Rome?"

A light broke in on me; there was some one in the background of whom Wattie wanted to tell me. Mechanically I felt for the bag in my bosom, then asked my companion if he could watch by Wattie the rest of the night. He agreed to do so, and promised to give the medicine I left, whenever the sick man awoke.

When I reached home I did not feel inclined to sleep. The poor lame lad, with his wistful eyes, haunted me. I threw a log on the fire (for the nights among the mountains are cold), took my pipe, and commenced to talk the matter over with Nero. He had risen on my entrance, and followed all my movements. He came now, sitting up on his tail by my side, and gravely placed his great paw on my knee.

The dog was good company, and I often took him into my confidence. Somehow, things looked clearer after such discussion.

"That lad 'll die, Nero," I began; "but we might let him die more comfortably. D'ye think we could manage it, old boy?"

Nero looked thoughtfully at me, and then round the room, as though he were considering the possibilities of the case.

CHAPTER IX.

Wattie's story.—Reminiscences.—My factotum.—The palmy days of Mial rush.—No one thought of danger.—Flash Jack.—Janet.

CERTAINLY my house consisted of two rooms only; but then I still had my original habitation at Mial—the tent. By putting that beside the house I might make a more comfortable place for Wattie to die in than the noisy shanty, and have him under my own eye.

I set to work at daybreak, and, with the help of the boy who came to attend to my horses, soon got a quiet shelter ready. I then set off with a mattress on a dray, determined to fetch Wattie home at once. He was very passive, appearing to care only about one thing.

"Let me speak first, and then do what you like," he said. "In the bag is fifteen pounds Oh! if 'twas only twenty, I should die happy! But I was ill—I couldn't work—mind and tell her that!"

"Stop, stop, Wattie! I don't understand who you mean. It's not possible that you're married?"

"Married? Nay, I'm not of the marrying sort any more than yourself, doctor; it's my mother—my poor old mother!" His voice failed; he was too weak to keep back the tears.

"Where does she live?" I asked. "Have you put down the address? Why, Wattie, now I think of it, I don't even know your name!"

"It's in the bag, with a bit of a note I wrote to you in case I shouldn't get to see you. I meant to have sent it by the other doctor."

I took out the bag, counted the money—it was in dirty notes and silver—and read the writing tied up with it.

"I understand, Wattie, now; make your mind easy; I will see that your mother has this."

"Don't tell her what a fool I've been. How often you've warned me, and—"

"Come, now, we'll talk of this another time; you've had your *say*; let me have my *do*."

We managed to get him across to my tent; he was too feeble to speak; I saw he did not expect to survive the move. However, he was better next day, and by degrees rallied a little. I knew it was only temporary, and so did he; but he was cheered by care and quiet. During the long nights he told me his story.

His parents were small farmers in Scotland—poor, but respectable—he the only child, petted by his mother, indulged by his father. He had a natural love of adventure when news of the gold discoveries reached Europe, and some of his companions determined to emigrate. Wattie insisted on accompanying them.

Accustomed to gratify his own wishes, neither his mother's tears nor his father's objections influenced his resolution. He "should do great things," and "come back rich." His mother should be a real lady. "Not that she's helpless or foolish; she's always busy and active is my mother," he would say proudly. "Ah! I think I see her now, leaning over the little gate, watching father and me crossing the bridge to catch the steamer that was to take me to Liverpool; how many, many times we looked back and waved hands to each other!"

So he left his home, buoyant with hope, full of plans to be accomplished on his arrival in Melbourne.

Wattie, like so many others, found things very different to his expectations. Lodgings were not to be had; he was thrown into bad company. The lad who had never before left the village he was born in, who knew nothing of the world, he was easily led away; of an excitable, sanguine temperament, ill-fitted to resist temptation.

Disappointed at meeting difficulties and privations where he had anticipated wealth and ease, he took to drinking.

Arrived on the diggings, the heat of the climate, the excitement of the digger's life, the recklessness of the society into which he was thrown—all these combined to drive him to further excesses.

It was touching to hear the lad speak of that time. What made it more painful was, that I knew Wattie's experience to be the experience of many. Young fellows, adrift on an altogether unknown sea, full of shoals and quicksands, how could they fail to make shipwreck?

"If," said he pathetically—"if I could have looked into *one* good face that loved me! But there was no good—no love; I forgot there were such things, except in my dreams sometimes, when I saw my old mother's face again."

In self-reproach I mentally echoed his "if."

If *I* had held a hand to the sinking lad, he might have been pulled ashore. However, he was very near the shore now. And I could not but think, in spite of all, that it was a peaceful shore he was nearing. Love for his mother was the great purifier. In his deepest degradation he had held fast to that. It was the only force strong enough to resist the enemy.

"Sometimes," he once said, "I used to think I would have to kill myself to keep from touching the money, and I never was easy till it was gone to help the old folks keep merry Christmas at home."

He was silent awhile, then exclaimed,—

"What a coward I have been!'"

He certainly regretted the past, but chiefly I think on his parents' account. He became easier when I had promised to befriend them in any necessity, and to say the best I could for him in writing to them of his death. He would lie still for hours, with only Nero for company, dreaming of home and of boyish days. He said these thoughts made him feel "as if God was close to him." As I was leaving him one night he whispered,—

"Doctor, do you think you could say 'Our Father'?"

I was taken aback. It was long since I had said it myself, but I knelt by his bed and repeated the prayer of my childhood—"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

Wattie murmured the words again when I had finished; then, folding his hands like a child . . . . "Our Father." . . . Wattie was not thinking of me, nor I of him at that moment.

The grey old village church of my early home rose up before me. There was the square, high-backed pew, just in front of the chancel screen, whereon stood a gilt angel with a trumpet in his hand; my father standing erect by the door (he was not able to kneel), repeating the familiar prayer after the clergyman—two children kneeling by his side, following his words. I heard my sister's low voice, and wondered if the boy whose little hand lay clasped in hers was really myself. How vivid it all was! How strange and far-off this peaceful, orderly English life seemed!

Wattie's murmured "Our Father" roused me. I got up softly; he appeared to be sleeping, and I stole quietly out of the tent.

The next morning I found him lying in the same posture, white and cold. He must have died soon after I left. Poor Wattie! He had known one pure feeling in his

brief life; he held to it, and it sufficed to drag him back from the slough of vice. Perhaps it was as well that its power to *keep* him out was not again tested.

I know he mistrusted himself. Again I say, poor Wattie! His was a weak, sensitive nature, unsuited to the life he had chosen. Had he fallen on better times, he might have been a worthier man. His lot was the lot of numbers in those days. Hospital wards in town and country, low boarding-houses in Melbourne, and public shanties on the gold-fields could tell of many a Wattie, the darling of the family circle, passing away yearningly, wearily, yet perhaps soothed at the last by the memory of childhood's love and childhood's prayer.

About two years after Wattie's death I was busy one morning in the surgery when I heard a great talking outside. Presently my factotum, Bob, rushed in, crying, "Doctor, doctor, what d'ye think? Who'd have guessed this? Here's Wattie's father and mother! They've come across the sea to look on his grave!"

It was really true. As the old man said, "The wife couldn't rest. She wanted to see how Wattie was laid."

"And you know, sir," she broke in, "we're lone folk; we've neither stick nor stone belonging to us—none but the boy—and it seemed lonesome-like for him, poor laddie, to be lying here by hisself. He couldn't come to us, you see, so we thought we'd e'en cross the sea to lie by him when our turn comes."

Mackay and his wife did not appear to mourn for their son, but rather to regard him as arrived safely at the end of a journey, whither they were following him.

I fancy it was a relief to their anxieties about him to think of him as beyond the reach of harm.

Since then we have become better acquainted. They often talk of their dead son; and so entirely satisfied are these simple people concerning the mystery beyond the

grave that I am tempted to ask, Is this unquestioning confidence the result of faith or stupidity?

Andy Mackay and his wife Janet will hereafter speak for themselves. They had a little money, and no idea of increasing it.

About the time of their arrival I was getting two additional rooms to my hut, making it more of a house. People were now beginning to gather comforts about them, and I was shamed into exerting myself to improve my outward surroundings a little.

Bob had been, for some years, the plague of my life. Nothing under two thrashings a week would keep him at all within bounds.

His father had been working in some of the large quartz mines over the range behind Mial, and had saved money, being a steady, industrious man; he had bought some land near, and was talking of returning to settle on it.

Bob's mother was dead, but his father was about to marry again; so I resolved to turn Bob over to his step-mother, Janet Mackay being willing to take charge of me and the house, while Andy would do the same for my horses and the stable.

Thus it came about that the close of the third year after Wattie's death saw Nero and me established in a house, which might be called *grand* as compared to our original iron oven, with Janet and Andy for our household. The old people attached themselves to me and were content; Andy soon made a garden round the place, and Janet half-ruined me in furniture. Whenever she went into the township there was always a something "the master's wanting;" though I must do her the justice to say her purchases were rather numerous than costly.

She takes great pride in keeping the house (as she

expresses it) "fit for the Queen—God bless her!—to sup in."

The only outside interest they have is Wattie's grave. Every Sunday afternoon they visit it, and the poor drunkard's resting-place is the brightest in the cemetery, for Andy always keeps it fresh and neat.

At Mial we have now advanced so far as to get our cemetery enclosed and planted. A project of keeping a sexton there has even been mooted. The formerly rough bush burying-ground is now trim and well kept, with handsome fence, gates, and "regulations" duly posted up.

Nero treats these "regulations" with silent contempt, and walks gravely along the gravel paths to the well-known spot, regardless of "regulation No. 3," which enacts that "No dogs shall be allowed to enter;" but then he is not simply "a dog," but a sort of "oldest inhabitant," and the township in general holds him in high esteem.

Bob's father and mother live on the hill opposite my house. Since the advent of a baby-sister, Bob has grown quite tame. Among the improvements at Mial, not the least is a school-house and a well-trained schoolmaster. Bob's father has had the sense to insist on that young gentleman's regular attendance. To be sure, he is rather old—according to colonial notions—for school; but his father says, "better late than never," and "since I couldn't afford to send him when he was little, he must go now he's big."

Bob's father is an example of what a sober, industrious digger may attain to. He is fond of relating how he walked from Melbourne with his swag on his back, sleeping out, and getting his food given him at the stations or small townships on the way. He kept his last shilling untouched until he had earned a pound.

Now he is the owner of a good farm, of some thousands of sheep, and a small, well-stocked cattle-run in a neighbouring settlement.

His wife has a handsome drawing-room, and a nice carriage, in which she may be seen driving to church on Sundays.

Bob can never be induced to patronize the carriage, but he has his own pony, and sometimes drives his father in a gig they have for use on the farm.

They talk of sending him to school in Melbourne next year, and I yet expect to see Master Bob write M.L.C. after his name. He is a sharp lad, and very honourable, not an atom of the sneak about him, which he says is owing to the thrashings the doctor gave him whenever he tried "gammoning."

I mention this instance of Bob's father to show that a digger's life need not, necessarily, be either rackety or unfortunate. Indeed, the present state of Mial is a proof of this.

The gold is nearly worked out—that is to say, there are no longer any great finds—but gold-digging is carried on like any other trade. The diggers in their yellow moleskins may be seen going to and returning from their work as regularly as office-clerks or tradesmen, issuing forth from neat cottages with their wives and families to attend church on Sundays, and escorting them to places of amusement on fine evenings.

Many have taken to farming or other pursuits in which they could advantageously employ the money made in mining. All this had been the work of years. During this time I have made one attempt at getting rich myself.

It was in the palmy days of Mial rush. I went in for a share in a claim near a dam by our creek. There were but three of us in this claim, and we were going on

swimmingly, had got new machinery up, could see gold, and expected a rich washing.

It was a sultry afternoon when we commenced to clean up; the clouds came rolling up behind the hills, and hung heavily on their round tops. A storm was raging on the other side of the range; we could hear the thunder among the distant mountains, behind which the heavens opened, not in flashes, but as displaying a vast expanse of sheeted light, lasting long enough to illumine the clouds in front, whose dark colour and fantastic shapes showed out against the brilliant background.

I watched the distant storm at intervals between the process of clearing up. With us it was quite calm; not a drop of rain fell; only the far-off sheeted light and lingering vibrations in the air told of the elemental strife outside our hill-encircled basin. It was sultry, and we worked slowly, resting occasionally, and congratulating each other on our excellent prospects. Towards evening we sat down under the shelter of a high gravel mound to refresh ourselves; the sun was setting behind it; we were thus protected from its fiery rays; it was also between us and the creek. Suddenly, without a moment's warning, an enormous sheet of water appeared coming round the high promontory which jutted into the creek. It swelled and swelled—now over the banks, now inundating the low ground. On it came—not a rushing torrent, but a heaving cloud—obliterating the distinctions of land and water, converting the whole flat into a moving sea—a terrific mass of water, before whose steady force houses disappeared, animals were engulfed, and machinery was swept away. Tents and cradles, blankets and tin dishes, cranks and whimseys, articles of furniture, pieces of sawn wood, logs, and bushes,—all went sweeping down the stream.

The terrified occupants of huts or tents by the creek

banks rushed to the higher ground, too much surprised to save anything.

'Our claim was flooded with a number of others; the machinery destroyed, the gold-dirt washed away. The great dam burst its banks; the low lands were one scene of desolation.'

It happened so suddenly that people lost their presence of mind. Had the storm burst over Mial, some preparation might have been made; but it was far away among the mountains, and no one thought of danger. In one hour Mial Flat—the busy scene of human industry—was changed into a watery waste. When the mighty wave subsided, the low ground looked as if suddenly upheaved from the sea, so thickly was it strewn with gravel, sand, stones, and vegetable débris.

The strangest thing was that not a drop of rain had fallen here; only the distant thunder and lightning told of the storm outside our basin, which had swollen the upper water-courses, and fed the great wave that invaded the valley. The dry, sultry air; the desolating wave; the terrified human animals flying before it; the stupor of the dumb beasts drawn into it, combined to make the sight such as one cannot forget.

I had lost all, and I never tried gold-mining again. Others, more persevering, returned to it, and have since been repaid for their persistency and courage.

Some time after the catastrophe, when the Flat had begun to resume its former aspect, I went to our shaft. Stooping over it, I called to Nero, who was with me. To my surprise, I found my voice came back to me as the hollow voice of a very old man.

The dog was puzzled; he approached and stood at the edge of the pit, looking inquiringly below. I laughed aloud, and the laugh was echoed, hollow and trembling. Nero barked, and his bark came back like the bark of a

toothless hound. The dog shrunk away howling, and the echo of the howl was ghastly. I have since returned to the pit and experimented with various sounds, always producing the same weird, hollow echo, which certainly has the oddest effect.

I console myself for the ill-success of my gold venture by smoking, cogitating, and observing. Now I smoke and cogitate among the trees of my own garden, instead of in the wild bush of former years, and I observe the lights in the town hall, announcing an entertainment there, or listen to the loud bell of the Methodist chapel, calling the people "to meeting," and I think of the evening when Wattie's wistful eyes looked out on me from the grog-tent doorway, and Nero's first master met his fate in the Teb-Teb dam. I can scarcely believe that on this spot, but a few years ago, similar scenes were enacted, for when I first came to Mial the wildest diggers held high carnival here.

The change has come by degrees. It is only when we think on the past that we perceive the enormous gap in social history which separates the *then* from the *now*.

I remember the first advent of a mail-coach "on" Mial. What excitement there was! What pride we felt!

Bob was much puzzled at the "*Co.*" painted in red letters on the back of the coach.

Being horsy, he understood the *cob*, but the "*Co.*" puzzled him. "Though indeed, doctor," said he, "there was but one cob in the team; but I expect they mean they'll trot along like cobs."

Until that epoch our mails had been carried by a man on horseback. A character he was, too.

"Flash Jack," we called him.

I had heard he had been well educated, but I hardly

believed it until the day our new postmaster arrived from Melbourne.

I suppose Jack had been too familiar, and the town gentleman (who had formerly dabbled in law) found it necessary to stand on his dignity.

Meeting Jack that day, I asked him how he liked the new head of his department.

"Fellow looks as if he'd swallowed Littleton and bolted Coke on top of him," said Jack.

You may be sure Jack soon disappeared; he was not in keeping with the more respectable order of things.

I have said little about my inner self. In truth, the years that have passed since I came to Mial have been so full of change, excitement, and occupation, that I seldom thought about my own feelings.

I certainly had (have, I suppose I ought to say) a sore feeling of disappointment at the bottom of my heart.

I have avoided the companionship of the fair sex, as they are called. I know them, and I scorn them for their readiness to sell their love to the highest bidder. When I see a man fool enough to fall into their snares, I hug myself in my armour of proof and feel that the superiority it gives me is worth the price I paid for it. Certainly women have not come much in my way except Janet, and one would as soon think of confounding her with the rest of her sex as of confounding Nero with his. My circle may be narrow, but, like other occupiers of narrow circles, I regard it as perfect, and want no intruders. Janet, my housekeeper, is a character in her way. She rules her husband openly, and makes no pretence about it, regarding him as a helpless inferior animal, who would speedily come to an ignominious end without her guidance and care.

Janet's indifference to appearances stamps her as superior to the natural cunning of her sex; so also does the honest attachment which shows in her every action. The

old people are warp and woof of one piece. It's a rough piece, but strong; beautiful, too, sometimes, when the light happens to fall on the golden thread of love which binds all together.

I fancy it was this golden thread out of which Wattie spun the halo which enveloped his mother in his memory, otherwise one could scarcely believe in the lad's pathetic attachment to his practical, managing mother.

Janet rules, not for self-pleasing, but because she thoroughly believes her rule is for the common good, and Andy is equally persuaded of it. It never occurs to him that he could possibly get along without her.

He is very fond of the vineyard, and proud of the wine they made last year between them. Sometimes he will linger, tending his vines, far beyond the hour of supper. Then Janet may be heard rating him soundly. She will fetch the old man in, waiting on him as on a wilful child, until he is comfortably settled at his meal. I believe he would miss the rating as much as the supper. What a wrench it will be when one of these is taken! I cannot imagine the other sorrowing long. I should not have supposed the thought of that time ever occurred to bustling Janet, only one day I saw her watching a funeral. It was that of an old man, long known in the township. Janet watched it winding along the hill. Nero was by her. She patted his head, saying,—

"Maybe *He*'ll call us all together." Her *words* included us all, but her *eyes* were fixed on Andy leaning on his spade at the bottom of the vineyard, also watching the funeral.

Moved by some impulse, she went and stood by him. Side by side their gaze followed the procession until it passed the crest of the hill.

The old man looked in her face. I don't know what he saw there, but he bent down and kissed her grey hair

almost reverently, and Janet scolded no more that day.

At first I had some difficulty in maintaining my personal independence, but a tacit understanding has been arrived at to the effect that Janet does as she pleases in respect to my food, clothes, and house arrangements, but that, in respect to my pipe and times of ingress and egress, I am a free agent and despotic in my surgery.

This treaty having been mutually accepted, we have got on comfortably for many years.

And is all to be upset now? I don't know; I dread the future. What will it be like? I cannot tell. Two women—ladies—English ladies—inmates of MY domicile!

CHAPTER X.

Something out of my groove.—New responsibilities.—"*Two* young mistresses?"—"The little un's worse to-night, doctor."—John Chinaman.—"Don't spend the siller for them that's nothing to you."

THIS is how it came about.

Towards the close of last year I received a letter—*the* letter which stirred up old associations, and put me upon commencing this record of my seeings, doings, and sayings in this new land.

I have a presentiment that things are now going to be turned upside down with me. My time of peace is ended—instinctively I desire to preserve a memorial of better days.

Well, the December mail in last year brought me an English letter. It is an unusual event for me to receive any communication from the old country. My father and sister have been dead many years. The former died soon after the birth of his second child, leaving his wife—my step-mother—with two daughters. She had her pension, and what remained of his small property—a sufficient home, which she had regarded so much. There was very little communication between us.

She wrote to me on my father's death, quite ignoring the past, and as though I had never known her in any other position than as my father's wife. After a while I replied coolly in the same strain. As my sisters grew to womanhood, one or two attempts at correspondence on

their part had been made; but, meeting with little response from me, they gradually ceased to write.

The mourning envelope which was now put into my hand excited curiosity rather than anxiety. There was nobody left for me to care much about. I scarcely recognized my sister's writing; it was firmer and more formed than when I had last seen it.

A sealed enclosure dropped from the envelope. I picked it up. One glance told me *whose* writing was there. I trembled as I read beneath the address, "To be forwarded unopened when I am dead." My heart gave a great bound. The frost of years was broken; a tide of warm natural feeling welled up.

So she was dead! The only woman I had loved—the only woman I had hated—she whom I had idolized and despised, longed for and spurned—she who had saturated my boyhood with rapture, and steeped my manhood in bitterness. I sat looking at the paper for some minutes without attempting to read it.

I do not know that I was grieved, or even shocked. I was rather surprised. Here was something out of my groove—something I had never contemplated.

Mechanically I took up my sister's letter. It told of her mother's death, and how she and Helen were left alone in the world. She said her mother had taught them to look to me as their natural protector, and had bidden them enclose her letter committing them to my care. Margaret took it for granted that they were to join me here. The old house had been sold, since Mrs. South's health had compelled her to reside in a milder climate. They had been living in Devonshire; the invalid's precarious state prevented their making friends in the new locality.

Margaret concluded by saying, "Helen and I feel very lonely here among a crowd of strangers. We seem to belong to no one. Let us come to you without delay!"

I put aside her letter and went to the door. I wanted air to lift the weight that oppressed me—to disperse the mist that was gathering about me.

Standing at my surgery door, I looked out, but did not see the scene before my eyes. Memory was busy with her kaleidoscope.

I saw Caroline, not as she was at our parting, but as she used to be before that visit to my father's house, when she was kind to the young apprentice who found all his happiness with her.

Then the figure of my father intervened—erect, dignified, but kindly withal.

Presently I remembered a photograph, long cast aside, of two little girls sitting on the ground weaving garlands of flowers. My father had sent this picture of my new sisters long, long ago.

It was lost or hidden. I had forgotten I ever had it, yet now it rose up vividly before my mental vision. I even recollected that one tiny figure wore a blue sash, and that the other had a sort of doll's pinafore on. It was odd that this photograph should so have printed itself on my brain, and there lain latent all these years.

Speculating on the curious phenomena of latent thought, I recovered my mental equilibrium and returned to the room to read my step-mother's letter.

It was calm and sensible, making very little allusion to the past that lay between us two; rather treating it as a boyish fancy on my part—referring to it only because, as she said, "it showed me your warm heart, in which I now ask a place for your father's daughters."

"You have not," the letter continued, "held much communication with us, but your sisters are not strangers to you. I have taught them to love you, and to regard you as their natural protector. I have full confidence in your worthiness to receive the precious charge I leave

with you. I know you will rise up to your duty, and accept your proper responsibility."

A few details of business matters concluded the letter.

As I read, my angry feeling towards the writer passed away. I saw her only as my father's widow. I begin to suspect that I have been cherishing a phantom love.

At length I do Caroline the justice to remember that she did not encourage my love; that the difference in our ages might excuse her for not trusting to it—for regarding it as the mere fancy of a boy.

The mental revulsion I experienced bewildered me. I put aside the letters and went out to walk. I can always think better walking—things seem to clear with the rapid movement in the open air.

Pondering the events of the period during which I had clung to my dream, I could not decide whether it had made me a better or a worse man—that is, whether the harm it had kept me out of equalled the good that it had checked in me. Had my mind been less morbid I might have been a more useful member of society. On the other hand, had I retained my natural buoyancy, I might have been hurried into excesses which I had avoided. I felt as if I were anatomizing another mind, speculating on what *might* have been, observing what *had* been in another life. It was then that I first conceived the desire of putting on record the impressions I had received, and describing the various social phases with which I have become familiar in my wanderings.

As a student I had contributed papers to my favourite periodicals, most of which, indeed, I have continued to receive during my sojourn "up country," so that I do not feel myself altogether behind the *thought* of my age, in spite of having lived so long outside of its conventional habits. Why should I not try? At any rate, I hoped it would furnish a private interest, and a mental resource,

with which I might console myself in the evil days of domestic disturbance which I saw looming in the future. Thinking of these things I retraced my steps. When I came in sight of the house, I had made up my mind to meet the new responsibility which had fallen on me.

Pushing open the gate, with a sigh, sent in anticipation of surrendered freedom, I confronted Janet, who was standing in the garden, her sun-bonnet front downwards—a favourite fashion of hers. I felt she was watching me, though I could not see her eyes. I knew she was aware that something had happened to cause me disturbance.

"I'll tell you presently, Janet," I said, "but let me have my dinner; I don't want to speak at all just yet."

"Is it a misfortune, master?—that's all I want to know."

"All right, Janet!" I answered, passing into the house. The old woman's brow cleared. As she placed the meal on the table I noticed that curiosity had succeeded anxiety with her. I fell to wondering how my sisters and Janet would get on—how, indeed, they would get on at all in this place—young ladies, bred up amid the orderly elegances of an English home, in the upper professional circles. I remembered my own sister's refinement and delicacy. What should I do if these girls were like her?

Janet watched me, and grew more and more curious. The comical side of the circumstances occurred to me. Would Janet lord it over the girls as she did over Andy and me? or would she make common cause with the superior sex against us inferior animals?

I suppose I smiled.

"That's right, master," said Janet; "I like to see the laugh in yer bonnie blue e'en!"

"Bonnie blue e'en, Janet; don't talk like that to me; you'll have to respect me now; I'm an old man, and a father."

"The Lord be gude to us!" cried she in consternation; "sure-*ly* ye've never been and committed yersel—been led astray, so to speak?"

"Don't be frightened, Janet; it's only the letter."

"*The* letter that was frae the auld countrie? Ye was but a bit lad when ye left,"—and she eyed me critically, evidently scanning the probabilities of the case.

"Well, Janet," said I, filling my pipe, "what do you say to having two young mistresses in the house?"

"*Twa* young mistresses? Is the child daft? Wouldn't *one* be enough at a time, sir?"

"Ah! but these run in couples; and it's as well, they're company for each other."

"Come, now, Doctor South." Janet always called me by my full name when she was displeased; it gave dignity to her expostulation. "Doctor South, will ye condescend to spake out plain to yer humble housekeeper?" She gave herself her full title too on these serious occasions.

"The fact is, Mrs. Mackay," said I—not to be outdone in solemnity—"I have received news of my step-mother's death. You recollect when my father died? Now his widow is dead also. She leaves my sisters to my care. I am not rich enough to go home, so they must come to me here."

"Twa young leddies to come here!"—and Janet surveyed our surroundings, pursing up her lips.

"I am their brother; it's my duty to care for them; they have no one in the world belonging to them but myself."

No one ever appealed vainly to Janet's sympathy; her heart is like a delicate musical instrument in a rough case, all gnarled and knotted outside; yet you have but to touch the keys to draw forth sweet sounds.

"Alone in the world be they? It's a cold drear place;

we must take them to our heart, master, and try to warm them there."

"At any rate, we must make the best of it," said I, the less disposed to the sentimental view, as visions of necessary additions to the house, furniture, &c., rose up in my mind.

"There's time enough, however, to talk about it," I added, as I left the room; "the mail won't leave for a fortnight, and it must be fully six months before they could arrive."

But, procrastinate as I would, the thought of the threatened invasion disturbed me. The hard crust began to gather again about my heart. That very night I commenced this writing, partly from a wish to occupy my mind, and partly from a genuine desire to be once more *en rapport* with former friends and home. So it came about that the last English letter I received struck the chord of bygone association, and moved me to this undertaking.

It is now four months since I began to write, and I already experience the relief of expression; it has marvellously cleared my head, and humanized my heart.

I see now that I have not been so badly treated as I imagined. I feel that I myself did not behave altogether rightly towards my father. I know that I was neglectful of the friends who helped me on my arrival here, and that I have been indifferent to the best interests of the neighbourhood in which I have dwelt.

The *one* thing I have been true to is my profession. I always loved that; I have always found pleasure in doing my best in that.

Perhaps it may be with me as it was with Wattie—this *one* duty honestly done may purify my heart and renovate my life.

As yet, however, the black fits have not vanished. I

often feel bitter and hard. I often talk unfeelingly—scoffingly.

But I have written to my sisters, and made arrangements for them to come to me.

Yesterday I received a letter from Margaret, telling me they were to sail in the "Frampton Castle" on the 10th of March. It is now April; they must have been at sea six weeks. Half the voyage will be over.

I have made some preparations for them here; but what am I to do about receiving them when the ship arrives?

I have not been to Melbourne since I left it, well-nigh twenty years ago. I feel reluctant to move out of my accustomed country jog-trot. I find one effect of living long out of the world is to induce moral laziness. One shrinks from the effort of rousing the spirit, and bracing the nerves for contact with mental activity and busy city-life. Or is it only habit that enslaves us country people—the dislike to having our accustomed routine broken in upon?

When I rise in the morning I feel brave, and equal to facing any change; before I have finished my morning pipe I usually make up my mind to meet my sisters personally.

I go into breakfast briskly, with a sense of courage and virtuous resolve.

Janet is busy at that hour, so I postpone telling her my intention until evening, when she will be at leisure. If I come home at mid-day, I am occupied with patients; but through all my engagements I feel an uneasy misgiving concerning my morning resolution, and am not sorry that I did not commit myself to Janet.

At evening I am tired, and find my book or writing such pleasant company, that I cannot see any reason why I should not depute some one else to meet the girls, and

bring them to Mial. So I go to sleep undecided, and wake to repeat the same formula of decision, doubt, and disinclination; but I must come to a resolution soon, or it will be too late to make the necessary arrangements.

I had writtten thus far last night, sitting quietly in my snuggery, with Nero snoring at my feet, when he suddenly pricked up his ears, rose, and uttered a low growl.

Presently a knock at the door; it was Wilson, Bob's father.

"The little un's worse to-night, doctor, and the missus can't rest till you've seen her. Will ye come across?"

I set out with him at once, for I felt anxious myself about the little girl Bob worshipped.

She had been ill some time. The autumn has been very dry, and children have suffered from the unseasonable weather.

Our township being situated in the hollow side of the ranges, we are often tantalized by seeing rain all round us, and not getting a drop. The high hills attract the moisture, especially on the south side; so that it never rains here when there is a south wind.

I should like to read a good geological report of this district. The whole basin might have been an inland sea, to judge from the enormous quantity of gravel that is turned up in every direction.

Last night we wound through heaps, and heaps, and heaps—nothing but deep holes and gravel-heaps.

People should not be ill in the night here. Indeed, as a rule they are not; it's impossible to ride on dark nights among these old shafts and deep holes.

Both Wilson and I know the road well enough; but the red heaps and white heaps, the deep holes and the shallow holes, so repeat themselves, that it's difficult to identify each particular one, so as to know which you have passed, and which remain to be passed.

I was glad when we got sight of a forsaken hut, which stands near the end of these tumuli. A light in the hut rather surprised me.

"Some swag-man taking up his night quarters?" I remarked.

"No," replied Wilson, "it's those Chinamen who have bought the tailings from the old 'Lucky' claim."

"Are they going to work it again?" I asked.

"I reckon 'twas pretty well worked before Heisher's party left it," said Wilson; "but the Johns think they'll get enough in re-washing to pay them. They've given four hundred for the claim as it is."

"Well, I recollect its yielding six ounces to the ton. People weren't very careful in washing up then; so I dare say the Celestials know what they're about."

We found the child very languid and feverish. I am too well used to bush practice to be unprovided (especially at night) with what would be likely to alleviate the symptoms I expect to find in a patient. So the fever was soon temporarily reduced, and the child slept.

"Please God she is no worse to-morrow, doctor, I start with her to Geelong the first thing," said the mother.

"Ay, ay, my girl, we'll do it this time, and no mistake," cried Wilson. "You've been telling us long enough that we ought to do it, doctor; but one thing and another hinders. One gets out of the way of travelling, living here quiet so long. I did hope she'd have got right without," added he, sighing.

I detected the paroxysm of misgiving succeeding to that of decision which I experienced myself, and was about to repeat my counsel when Mrs. Wilson interrupted,—

"What'll be the comfort of all we've got, father, when the little one is gone? And indeed it's not so long that

any of us have got to stop here that we should mind putting ourselves about a bit."

"We'll go, wife, sartain sure," replied Wilson. "I'm got lazy. Time was when I thought nothing of shouldering my swag and going on the tramp. I'll do it again, need be," added he, rising and shaking himself.

It was just the lesson I needed.

Encouraging their determination, I took my leave, promising to look in early next morning before they started.

During my walk home I matured my plans, settled who I would get to look after my more pressing patients, attend at my surgery on vaccination days, &c. Resolved not to allow myself a chance of withdrawal, I told Janet, directly I went in, that I meant to go to Melbourne to bring my sisters home myself.

For a minute she looked doubtful; then her heart told her it was the right thing to do; still she could not bring herself to utter anything but cautions.

"Ye'll be careful, doctor, and mind what ye're about. I don't know aught of towns myself, but I've heard tell as how they're awful places, and there's a text in Scripture itself about the wicked a-dallying at the corners of the streets."

"Why, Janet, you forget I was bred in a town, and once knew London and Paris as well as I know Mial."

"Ay, ay, sir, na doubt, but ye'll remember yer watch; and there's them new kerchiefs—the *set*, mind. Don't go for to spoil it by losing one. Perhaps," added she thoughtfully, "ye'd best take only the old things."

"I think so too, Janet," I said, "seeing the general turn-out will look ancient in town."

"Don't spend the siller for them that's nothing to you. Ye'll have enough to do with the leddies to keep."

I felt quite brave after my resolve. The prospect of

mixing again in the world is rather agreeable when once it has become inevitable.

Mixing in the world, forsooth! How one's ideas change! I once regarded existence in Melbourne as absolute banishment. We young fellows at Guy's thought London and Paris the world in our days; but that former life was a narrow one after all. For variety of character, and seeing below the surface of things, commend me to the close roughness of life on a digging in full swing. It's as good as ship-board for observing what people really are, and much more varied.

I have now made all my arrangements, and I start to-morrow. I shall have no time for writing in town, so I mean to leave my papers behind, hoping, on my return, to continue this narrative, which must henceforth include sketches of my sisters, and some of the incidents which befall them in their new home.

CHAPTER XI.

Melbourne.—Antediluvian memories.—*Après moi le Déluge.*—Is the voice a natural expression of identity?—At the levée.—Our colonial aristocracy.—In the cemetery.—A cosmopolitan burial-ground.

WELL! the great event has taken place. I have been to Melbourne, and am at home again. To my own keen satisfaction, I was both interested and amused.

To Janet's great relief, I have not been corrupted or robbed. But the grand resolution is accomplished. Last week I brought my sisters home, and at the present moment I hear them chattering and laughing in their room.

Once more I say, to my great relief, I do not find myself bullied or interfered with. To Janet's intense satisfaction, she has two more to love and—to domineer over.

Andy regards our new inmates with reverential admiration. I fancy he has a notion that they are allied to the fairy creatures, requiring to be daintily treated and cherished, but from whom nothing but prettiness is to be expected. Nero is the only person not satisfied. He condescendingly tolerates them, but shows a decided preference for their absence.

Just now, as Margaret and Helen retired for the night, he looked up at me with something nearly approaching to a wink—an expression which plainly said, "Now, then, old fellow, we'll enjoy ourselves."

He's now snoring at my feet—a luxury he never per-

mits himself when my sisters are present—not, I fear, so much from politeness as from suspicion.

I feel refreshed by my visit to town, but I am not sorry to be quiet again and to have leisure for thinking of what I saw. It is only now, when I come to look back on it, that I understand how surprised I have been by the aspect Melbourne presents at the present time. The visit has left on my mind two distinct impressions—one is a vivid sense of the marvellous result of man's labour in the aggregate; the other an equally vivid sense of his personal insignificance as an individual.

The sight of this handsome city, with its wide-flagged streets, elegant shops, and substantial warehouses—its fine public buildings, clubs, and hotels—its numerous churches, spacious hospitals and asylums—its trim public gardens, extensive suburbs, luxurious villas and pretty cottages—its convenience for sea-side residence at St. Hilda, Brighton, &c.—its docks, piers, and shipping at Sandridge and William's Town—its noble free library and public schools—its university, museums, and athenæums—its liberal supply of water and gas—its well-kept roads, intersected in all directions by long and short lines of railway—the sight of these, as the result of little more than twenty years of labour, is a grand testimony to the energy and activity of our countrymen. At the same time, walking along these crowded streets, or looking out on this hive of human beings, I received a painful impression of personal insignificance. The busy throng pursued its way altogether unconscious of the retrospective comparisons crowding my mind. We country people are apt to forget that events of importance in our small sphere are of no account at all outside that narrow world.

Somehow we residents at Mial could not divest ourselves of the notion that the turning of the first sod on our railway sent a thrill through the universe. We refrained,

indeed, from following the example of some of our neighbours, who, when their telegraph line was opened, sent a congratulatory message to the Lord Mayor of London. Happily we had heard how that bewildered functionary, after vainly inquiring in official circles, telegraphed to Melbourne for information as to the whereabouts of Blank Town before he could acknowledge the compliment it had paid him.

Still, though nobody proposed congratulating the City of London on being *en rapport* with us, we all felt that England had taken a step forward as well as Mial.

Dr. South's journey to Melbourne was a matter of general interest in that friendly township. He waved his hand to many from the coach-box, cheerily assuring them he would bring back the latest fashions—in medicine!

His arrival in the capital was altogether a different affair. The railway porters flung out his portmanteau indiscriminately with a heap of other luggage; the cabmen jostled and pestered him with their incessant, "*Cab, sir?*" just as they did everybody else. No one appeared even to see him until he stopped at the Port Phillip Club Hotel. Here an elegant official, in irreproachable broadcloth and spotless tie, eyed him doubtfully. Accustomed to the visits of squatters from all parts of the bush, the P.P.C. official did not object to the doctor's costume on the whole; it was only the battered sugar-loaf hat that was too much for him—my favourite shelter from the burning sun at Mial. It certainly did look peculiar on a cool day in town. Observing the man's dubious gaze at it, I instantly felt guilty towards Janet, who had admonished me to be sure and change my hat when I left the coach to join the train; "for," said she, "you'll be sheltered then, and it's more decent-like to wear the black hat—the more so, sir, as ye say it's old-fashioned."

Mechanically I now looked round for my hat-box. Alas! it was gone. I must have left it in the coach when I joined the train. This little incident woke me up.

Since the cab had stopped before this handsome many-windowed building, I had been trying to trace some vestige of the old P.P.C., with its wooden front, and two long windows opening on to the narrow verandah, which was supported by logs resting on the ground. I now discharged my cab, and desired the man to send my things upstairs, and let me know the number of my bed-room.

Passing into the public room, I was gratified to find how naturally the city habits of my youth returned to me; but somehow I felt quite ancient—a sort of Noah, full of antediluvian memories, surrounded by a new generation.

Certainly a deluge had passed over this land—the deluge of Anglo-Saxon activity and progress.

I was comfortably lodged—no doubt more comfortably than would have been possible in the time of the original Port Phillip Club Hotel. As I dined, I scrutinized the faces of the numerous comers and goers. Not one did I recognize.

The waiters were a new order of men—the guests a new race. By degrees I began to forget Melbourne, and to fancy myself in London. In my sleep that night, London and Paris were curiously mixed up with the rattle of cabs and the noise of the train passing and repassing under Prince's Bridge.

I spent the greater portion of next day in topographical researches, endeavouring to discover the whereabouts of former localities. I found that short cuts through ancient "rights of ways" led me into smart offices, and a straight path we primevals had beaten out for ourselves to the old flagstaff now ran through a big building, before which a sentry mounted guard.

The growth of the city is astonishing—every adjunct and luxury of modern civilization within reach of its inhabitants—evidences of refinement and culture on all sides.

Regarding the Melbourne of early days, and beholding the Melbourne of to-day, one gets an idea of the manner in which nations have grown up; and yet it seems as if this latest child of Civilization had sprung into life at one bound. I am speaking, of course, of her outward aspect. If, in material things, she has profited so rapidly by the experience of older countries, we may surely believe she must ere long benefit by it also, politically and socially. At present, regarded politically, Victoria reminds one of a youth, buoyant in the exuberance of strength and freedom, squandering his capital, revelling in prosperity, expecting the flush of health and wealth to last for ever, careless of the warning beacons, indifferent to the prudent examples of older nations.

Let us hope that the natural good sense of the robust youth will pull him up in time. He has squandered a good deal; but there's enough left yet of his magnificent fortune to retrieve the past, if honest statesmanship and plain good sense would come to the rescue.

However, I am not going to enter on politics; for which, indeed, my country life has quite unfitted me. I have there only seen something of our singular and ever-changing Land Laws, and have often wondered how our successors are to carry on, when the Land Revenue is exhausted—that being the staple on which we now draw to meet an enormous expenditure. Perhaps they may have learned to deny themselves some of our luxuries—such, for instance, as a Mint, worked at a loss of 10,000*l.* a year; and a School Act, leaving 42,000 children altogether unreached, which costs the country nearly 500,000*l.* annually.

But this is a digression. *Après moi le Déluge.* To return to the present. I found a few shops with familiar names over the doors; but only one which was not enlarged and improved out of all recognition. It was refreshing to find there a familiar face, not now behind the counter, but in an office at the back of the shop; still I was disappointed at finding it necessary to recall mysèlf to his memory. Laying this to heart, I went next morning to a barber, and got my hair and beard a little modernized; after that to the Shipping Agents, to inquire about the "Frampton Castle." I learnt she was expected daily, and, being thus reminded of the sea, determined to pass the morning at Sandridge—still Liardit's in my mind. Having now seen it in its new guise, I shall not again be tempted to miscall it.

It has a pier, nearly a mile long, for convenience of loading and unloading vessels in connexion with the railway. Large ships were moored on each side, and three or four fine iron steamers, preparing to leave for neighbouring colonies.

Business—bustle—life thronged the place. I went aside to the quieter beach, by the baths, sat down in a boat, and began to think of the last time I had been here, when my kind friends, the Raines, left these shores.

A then well-known legal luminary had returned with me from the ship. It was stormy; the waves washed into the boat. We found we were not making way; something was wrong with the rudder. It was unshipped, and a small, young shark found entangled in it—the connexion of the rudder with the stern being rather imperfect.

"Hoot, man! couldn't ye die without hindering us?" cried our testy friend, whose temper was not improved by the prospect of a four miles' walk to town—there being no conveyances then between the beach and Melbourne. Had

I ventured to hint at a future of railways and telegraph lines, I might have lightened the weariness of the way by affording an opening for my companion to descant on the presumptuous folly of young men.

Sitting, thinking thus, I presently observed the William's Town steamer crossing to the pier.

Going on board her, I almost persuaded myself that I was undertaking a voyage; and hoped the wind would rise, that I might try whether my sea legs would yet serve me.

However, there was no opportunity for making the experiment; the weather was calm, the space limited.

Leaning against the side, I looked out for the old landmarks. There was the beach from Sandridge to St. Hilda, with a building which I did not recognize on it; there also the first Bluff, with three solitary graves—relics of the early quarantine ground; yet again beyond, the Red Bluff below Brighton.

Across, looking towards Geelong, I beheld the identical mirage of trees and high land that Mrs. Raine and I had noticed when pacing the deck before the accident which hastened their departure.

What a blessing it is that Nature does not change!

Surrounded by the tremendous results of human energy, it rests the mind to turn to Nature—silent and slow in her inward processes—unchanging and equal in her outward aspect!

Is the voice a natural expression of identity? I think it is. It had been said to me the day before, "I know your voice, though I do not recognize your face." I also now heard a voice which I remembered.

Two gentlemen had come on board, just as the steamer was putting off. Absorbed in my own thoughts, I had not noticed them at first. One was talking eagerly; his voice passed unheeded; but when the other took up the

conversation, its ringing tone, accompanied by the hearty laugh, came back like the echo of forgotten years.

Curiously I surveyed the speaker, taking note of the changes time had made.

The good-natured, gentlemanly officer, in whose company I had ridden to Teb-Teb, was now the grey-bearded, bald-headed man—gentlemanly and benevolent as ever—but with a careworn, anxious look in his lined countenance.

When he had ceased to speak, his eye met mine, and gazed beyond towards the shore.

Involuntarily I smiled. The smile arrested his attention; he looked puzzled, as if trying to recall some memory.

"You'll know the voice, captain," said I, going up to him. How cordially he shook my hand!

"My good fellow, are you dead or alive? as they say in my country; either way, I'm heartily glad to see you."

"Well," said I, "it appears to me that I've come back, at any rate, to another world;" and we fell to talking of people and events, as men do who have not met for years.

"Yes," said he, when we had named one and another dead, absent, lost sight of, "I'm almost left alone; but then you know I keep up with the age. Obliged to be still in harness, I can't afford to go in for the 'last man' style of things."

This new world had grown up gradually before his eyes; the change was not startling to him as it was to me, on whom it had burst all at once.

Talking of this, my friend said, "You must go to the levée to-morrow; there you will get an idea of the social changes we have gone through since worthy Charles Joseph's halcyon era;" and he promised me an *entrée* card, so that I could remain to observe the passers-by.

Next day was one of those fine, bracing winter days, when the climate of Victoria is perfection—the air cold, but the sun warm—its warmth tempered by the lingering touch of the night's frost.

The levée was quite a brilliant affair. Handsome carriages thronged the streets; well-dressed pedestrians crowded the pavements. The "great unwashed" were represented by a respectable mob, hanging about the Town Hall. Officials bustled about; guns began to boom; then every eye turned in the direction of Prince's Bridge. A guard of soldierly-looking men rode up; and her Majesty's representative, surrounded by a brilliant staff, ascended the steps and entered the building. Other carriages containing personages in official costume followed.

I presented my card and at the same moment caught sight of my friend peering through the half-open door of a side-room. He motioned me to join him.

The Governor and his suite were about to enter the Hall. His Excellency paused a moment, and, turning to Captain G., said,—

"Your friend of the pre-historic ages, I presume?"

I bowed.

"Come and dine with us, doctor, and make our hair stand on end with stories of the savages."

I got a capital corner for observation, being pretty well out of sight myself.

Among the hundreds who passed before the Governor I recognized perhaps half a dozen.

Conspicuous among the viceregal party was the grand old veteran who for a quarter of a century had represented the British army here.

At four-score years of age, still military-looking and erect, a fine representative of the old style of British officer—a class of men whom our younger colonists have

seldom seen, who grow rarer and yet more rare among us.

I also recognized, in gorgeous apparel, one of our judicial functionaries, who used to be the leader in many a lark lang syne, and was one of "the boys" who were a sore burden to the worthy Crown Prosecutor's housekeeper.

A pair of solemnly-jocose eyes looked out at me from the Consular staff, and I remembered the jolly "How be'ee?" with which their owner would greet me in allusion to the provincialism of our common county.

It was pleasant to hear the familiar tones again. Certainly old colonists seem heartily glad to meet each other.

I suppose, as we go on in life, we cling more to the past. Our *feelings* whisper that it was dearer, yet our *reason* tells us the present is a vast improvement on it.

I may as well say here that the few whom I had formerly known received me very kindly. Every evening of my stay in town after this was spent with one or other of them, and I made many new acquaintances.

I am bound to confess that (taking them as a whole) the colonists of to-day are worthy successors of the earlier pioneers.

One arrangement at the levée was certainly an improvement—that is, the presence of ladies in the gallery.

Levées in William Street used to be sombre-looking affairs. Official costumes were fewer, and ladies nowhere.

Now, as the papers said, "a brilliant assemblage of beauty and fashion graced the Hall."

You had but to glance upward, and lo! fairy-land was before you. Dream-land, too, it seemed to me, as I beheld a living, blooming Polly talking to an officer, who, I afterwards heard, was a guest at Government House, and had a handle to his name.

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Polly, surely! The

same bright, delicate face which I had first seen sitting on the berth in the emigrant ship, and afterwards white and cold before it was hidden beneath the weighted canvas.

This Polly was not white and cold, but warm and blooming, laughing gaily with the gentleman at her side.

I inquired who was that young lady, and heard it was Miss ——, the daughter of one of our most prominent legislators.

"That," added my informant, "is Mrs. —— talking to her ladyship."

I followed his glance and saw a familiar face—changed, but still the same. Certainly, if my attention had not been directed that way, I should not have recognized in that elegantly-dressed matron the Hester whom I had last seen handing a nobbler across the bar counter.

She had grown stouter, and the saucy indifference of the pretty girl, who knew her beauty made her mistress of the situation, was changed in the matron into a becoming hauteur in keeping with her acknowledged position in society.

I wondered, "Did she sometimes think of the still face and the dull splash, and the unnatural quiet which fell on the emigrant ship for a little while after the solemn burial at sea?" I am sure she does, for hers is a loving heart, and I don't believe prosperity has deadened its warmth of feeling.

Had I gone to her I know she would have received me kindly, in spite of associations incongruous with her present condition, which sight of me must have revived.

But I avoided this. What was the use?

I would rather think of her as the affectionate sister who nursed the sick girl devotedly, and mourned her faithfully.

She cannot forget those days while that bright girl with Polly's look and Polly's smile is by her side.

Thought I, "How wonderfully we men and women rise to circumstances! how great is the influence of circumstances, not only on our character but on our very appearance!"

If I had got an idea of the rise of nations by contemplating the full-grown city which I had known in its infancy, I now got an insight into the rise of families.

Here is the germ of a future aristocracy.

When Democracy shall have driven the State-coach over Niagara, and it turns up again on the other side, Aristocracy will come into fashion, and I trust the descendants of Polly's sister will worthily fill a high position.

Let no one despise our colonial aristocracy, or talk of Brummagem gentility. A few centuries ago, the ancestors of the great families of Europe were emerging in a similar manner from obscurity—in some cases not quite so creditably.

I would rather have the hotel bar in the background of my family tree than the bar sinister, even though the arms of Royalty crossed it. There may be more dash in winning land and position by the sword, which is an honourable road to distinction certainly, yet not more so than the one fashioned by honest labour.

So again, I say, all honour to our colonial aristocracy who have won their position by steady industry, and are training their children to grace that position by the culture and refinement a good education gives.

When I left the Town Hall I felt I had had enough of crowds, and wanted quiet to consider what I had seen; so, declining to accompany my friend to the review, I walked northward, towards the new cemetery. (*New*, I had mentally termed it, remembering the small enclosure at the western hill, which was our first cemetery.)

The large Melbourne cemetery was not now thronged with living occupants, as it had been in the Canvas Town period; the throngs now lay beneath its surface. I was surprised at the manner in which it has filled up. I don't remember how many thousands the man at the lodge told me lay there, but I know that the sight of its closely-arranged mounds and numerous monuments brought home to me, more vividly than anything had yet done, the reality of the changes and vicissitudes time has wrought. It has passed over me with few vicissitudes. A new rush, the finding of rich gold, the settling of the township, additions to my house and garden—these, with the interests of my profession, and the advent or exit of one and another on our small area, were the greatest changes I had known, and they had come about so gradually as to be almost unnoticed.

In this city of the dead I was brought face-to face, all at once, with the mighty changes of years.

What anguish and disappointment! What suffering and sorrow! What vanished hopes and gloomy fears did this graveyard represent!

Of course one knows that the tragedy of life and death is always going on around us; but if you want to realize its weight, its solemn majesty, visit a burial ground which has been filled since last you stood on that spot. I am not what is called a religious man; but, thinking on the once restless brains and busy hands and loving hearts that now lie still beneath that sod, I comprehended the glory of a belief in the spirit's continued consciousness, and the peace which must spring from a simple faith in the unchanging goodness of the Great Father of all. And (as Wattie used to say) I myself felt very near to God, while, with hushed heart, I wandered on in that territory of the dead.

Musing on the mystery of life and death, my eye fell

on a stone whose simplicity seemed to rebuke curious, questioning thoughts—a large white stone inscribed with the sacred symbol and one name—the name of a wife and mother, whose place I well knew could never be filled.

All sweet hopes bound up with that name are expressed in the significant words,—

"I believe in the resurrection of the dead."

Near by was another grave, freshly made; a bunch of violets lay on it, whose delicious perfume scented the air—apt symbol of the beautiful memories which fill the heart of him who laid them there.

I sought out the last resting-place of one of my professional brethren whom I had met once or twice before my departure from Melbourne, and whose remarkable force of character had largely influenced those who came within its reach.

From a distance I had watched his brilliant but short career. His early death was a loss to the colony, and seriously retarded for a time the progress of medical science among us.

His grave reminded me of those of the old crusaders in our church at home. He was a crusader too, fighting against disease and wretchedness; his noblest monument remains in the hospital he was largely instrumental in founding for suffering women.

Wandering on, I came to the Chinese portion of the cemetery. Here are three sexagonal buildings, a fireplace in the lower part of each, a grating above the fireplace, and a chimney running up through. Marks of blood were near and in this grating.

I had no opportunity of inquiring concerning the funeral ceremonies practised here. Doubtless they include an offering to propitiate the spirits of departed ancestors—a concession to Feng-Shui of some kind—for, although

the Chinaman in Victoria is comparatively free from his native superstitions, he never seems able to shake them off entirely. In the bush, where the Chinese are obliged to live any way and any how, one sees little of their peculiar ceremonies; but wherever they are in a position for social organization they return, so far as is practicable, to the customs of their native land.

There is a curious contrast between ourselves and immigrants from Eastern nations in our respective manners of bearing the disruption of early habits incident to life in a new country. While the Briton on the diggings laments loudly, after the customs of his youth, the Eastern will appear absolutely indifferent to them; but no sooner is an opportunity of returning to them afforded than the latter avails himself of it with an alacrity which shows how tenacious is the hold they really have on him. The average Briton, on the contrary, who grumbled most at his loss, will have become habituated to it, and, when again within reach of observances—counted sacred in early days—will scarcely care to avail himself of them at all.

Chinese funerals are of no account in the bush, but plainly in Melbourne they must be conducted on the national pattern. I observed, in front of each white head-stone, a pan filled with sand. The lettering on the stones was, of course, in Chinese characters, done in gold on some, on others in black letters. I came next to the Jewish ground, where the monuments are very handsome. The names inscribed on them bring to mind the leaders of that grand old race whose thoughts have permeated the world. The ancient characters and independent chronology indicate the national individuality of this people, who mix with us as fellow-citizens, fellow-subjects, neighbours, friends, and yet stand alone—another instance of the ease with which Easterns will bend to

circumstances, and of the tenacity with which they will cherish the ideas and customs of their race.

In the new burial-ground of one of the world's newest countries, within sight of the hurry of colonial life, these ancient names and dates read strangely :—

"DAVID SOLOMON, DIED 5631."
"DANIEL ABRAHAM, DIED 5638."

A broken column marked the resting-place of one whose career had been cut short in youth; it bears date 5628.

Another monument showed two hands, in white marble, raised upwards, the thumbs meeting, and a space between the two first and two last fingers of each hand—a symbolical image, perhaps, with whose meaning I am unacquainted.

This portion of the cemetery is suggestive of the superb indifference with which this ancient people regard our changing modern beliefs and ceremonies.

I left the place, thinking of one and another whose familiar names are enshrined in deeds of philanthropy and charity. Words which I had read again and again on the monuments recurred to me,—

"They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

If the city of the living had impressed me with a sense of human activity and personal insignificance, the city of the dead told of the glory of a useful life, and of the blessedness of a hope which stretches beyond the visible present.

I had lingered so long here that I had not time to visit the University, which is close at hand—a fine building, in spacious grounds, attached to which is a well-filled museum.

I noticed a modest building near, which, I was informed,

is the Church of England College, affiliated to the University. This reminded me that the next day was Sunday. I don't know much about the Melbourne churches, but I determined to avail myself of this opportunity of making acquaintance with at least one of them.

CHAPTER XII.

A brother practitioner.—Sunday in Melbourne.—My sisters.—Turn and turn about.—Getting acquainted.—Dr. and Mrs. Wyse.—Just the place for the young ladies.

I HAD an engagement for the afternoon of Sunday with a former acquaintance—friend, I may say—for though I had known little of him personally, I had corresponded with him, when occasion arose for communication with a fellow-practitioner.

We had studied at the same hospital, but not at the same time, I being the senior in the profession, though Doctor Wyse has long passed me in the race. He is now at the tip-top of the profession. I knew that he made a point of attending evening service when his engagements would allow him to do so. It occurred to me that he would name a church likely to interest a stranger who had but one Sunday to spend in Melbourne.

Remembering that he had been at the hospital late the night before, I would not disturb him by going to the private entrance, but walked into the waiting-room, and sat down there until he should be ready to receive.

Though it was early, there were several patients.

A woman and a lad sat in the farther corner, the latter evidently in an advanced stage of consumption; the hectic flush, the frequent cough told their own tale; so also did the woman's anxious face. The lad's cough seemed to shake *her* whole body. I saw her wring her hands to-

gether tightly, as if suppressing a groan. She would rise up and go to the window, mechanically feeling if draught came from it.

Two workmen, apparently from the country, stood by the fire-place; one was deformed, the other had his hand tied up. A smartly-dressed young woman entered. The gaiety of her costume contrasted painfully with the sunken eye and bloodless lip, which told of long hours spent at the sewing-machine.

Another woman camesin carrying a child, whose ankle was bandaged. The child grew fretful. I suggested a more comfortable posture for the little sufferer.

This led to a conversation. The woman told me her child had been suffering long from weakness of the ankle; latterly it had become so bad that she could not stand.

"This is the only day I have time to bring her to the doctor. I might get her into the hospital, but she's my only one, and her father is dead," said the woman, pressing the child closely to her, as if reason and feeling were arguing within her for and against the hospital. "It seems but the other day," she continued, "that her father used to come here for advice. If he could have followed it, why, he might have been alive now; but when he felt better he would work; and work he did to the last. Doctor Wyse was very kind; though we live in the country, he came to see him—but 'twas too late."

"I suppose it's difficult for a medical man in good practice to leave town, even for a few hours," I replied, by way of saying something.

"Ah! there's none has a better practice—and he deserves all that's thought of him." Then, scanning me furtively, she remarked, "Looks is deceitful. I shouldn't have taken *you* for one of the Sunday patients; they're mostly working folks."

"I'm a working man, but not a patient."

"Then you know Doctor Wyse gives his Sunday mornings to them as can't come weekdays," she said.

Presently a gentleman entered, apparently a clergyman. I was surprised to see him there on that day.

The doctor's bell rung.

I suppose I was regarded as the first comer, for the clergyman turned to me, saying,—

"I shall not detain the doctor five minutes. Will you yield me this gleam of sunshine? It is only when the sun is out that he can examine my throat."

I motioned him to pass forward.

"What do you want, South?" cried the doctor, who had caught sight of me.

"A direction for church; but it can wait."

"Come in; Mr. —— will not mind you. A brother professional from the country," added he, addressing the clergyman.

Doctor Wyse appeared fresh and brisk, but with the air of a man who had overslept himself, risen hurriedly, plunged into a bath to get wakened, and commenced the day with the suppressed irritability of a conscientious man trying to overtake his work.

A few words with the patient, an appointment for his next visit, and then, turning to me, he said,—

"Mr. —— will be your convoy I'm sure. Necessity now compels him to occupy the pew instead of the pulpit."

The clergyman and I left the house together.

It was a crisp, sunny morning. A shower had fallen in the night, and the flags shone white and clean. The air was full of the sound of church bells; the chimes of the cathedral on the opposite hill, distinguishable above others, were wafted toward us on the south-west breeze. From the top of Collins Street the city looked fair and handsome. Groups of well-dressed people, carrying prayer-

books, evidently proceeding to their respective churches, gave a distinctly English aspect to the place.

It was late, and Mr. —— proposed that we should turn in to a church near. We found it well filled; so much so, that I should have experienced some difficulty in getting a seat but for my companion. As it was, we were placed where I could command a good view of the church.

I cannot say much for the architecture of the building. Indeed, ecclesiastical architecture in Melbourne is at a very low ebb. There is a pretentious chapel in Collins Street which looks like a court out of the Alhambra. I don't know much about styles of architecture, but this one somehow connects itself in my mind with specimens of the Moorish or Saracenic. Most of the churches are simply ugly, but when the new Roman Catholic Cathedral is finished the reproach of not having one really good ecclesiastical building will be taken away from Melbourne. There is also a handsome Presbyterian church in course of erection on the site of the old one in Collins Street.

The church we had entered is by no means an imposing structure, yet it had managed to put on an ecclesiastical air inside at any rate. I found it was a festival day. The sun streamed through the richly-stained window, its tinted rays falling on the altar table, draped and prepared for the celebration of the sacred feast. Two white-robed priests stood within the rails. A golden cross on a white ground hung in front of the pulpit. A band of surpliced choristers were placed at the opposite end of the church, on each side the organ. There must have been nearly seven hundred people present, apparently belonging to the higher classes, if one may judge from their dress.

It was long since I had been present at a choral service; perhaps that was why the scene and the music impressed me so much.

The crowded church, the significant ceremonies, the

beautiful service, the pealing organ, the thrilling voices of the choristers, combined to produce an effect at once grand and solemn.

The solo in the anthem was exquisitely rendered. The singer's voice, in perfect tune, clear as a bell, poured forth again and again the sublime words,—

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee."

As the lingering cadence died on the ear, the scene described in the record of their original utterance rose before me. The large upper room, the plainly-furnished table, the few poor fishermen sitting around it, the serenely majestic mien of the Master, who talked of peace, and love and joy, while strife, prejudice, and sorrow were at hand.

Where was the connexion between all this and the surroundings amid which these words were now repeated? I could not tell, and yet I felt there was a fitness. Was it in the grand, calm triumph which sounded in the words, in spite of the conditions under which they were spoken?

In harmony with them was the preacher's exhortation, bidding us to "*wait*" for the full development of the Creator's purposes—to wait in love and charity, not suffering the catholicity of Christianity to be warped by petty jealousies or narrowed by outward differences.

At the close of the sermon I, in company with the majority of the congregation, left the church, again to encounter numbers returning from other places of worship. It may be old-fashioned, but I confess I was pleased to find that the English Sunday is still the Melbourne Sunday. To my mind it is an indication of a future not unworthy of England's youngest child. Meeting the many returning worshippers, I felt that not one among them spent his rest day more worthily than did the skilful doctor, busy among his needy working-class patients.

My first walk every morning was to the telegraph

station. I was growing impatient for news of the "Frampton Castle," knowing that I was wanted at home. It was with pleasure, not altogether unmixed with anxiety, that I at length read the name of that vessel among the list of arrivals telegraphed from Queen's Cliff.

Inquiring at the agent's, I found she was expected at the Sandridge Pier that afternoon.

The prospect of having Margaret and Helen on my hands that very night was at least as embarrassing as it was satisfactory. I had never before had to care for any one but myself. On the whole, I had not found that person difficult to please; but two of womenkind!—that is altogether a different affair.

I was curious as to how it would feel to have them always in the house, which suggested to me the necessity of providing some lodging for them.

I had come to be quite on friendly terms with the housekeeper at the Port Phillip. She rather patronized me, chiefly, I fancy, because I often ran against her in odd nooks of the house during my explorations in search of the boundaries of the old hotel. At first she had been inclined to resent my intrusion, but had come now to humour my antiquarian craze. I think she must have been a bit of an antiquary herself, for she had become interested in my researches. I resolved to ask her to direct me to a suitable lodging for my sisters. The hotel was very full, and altogether I thought a more private place would be better for them. She at once undertook to arrange for their reception at a respectable boarding-house kept by a friend of her own.

This being settled, I had just time to catch the train for Sandridge, in which were several persons going also to meet expected passengers by the "Frampton Castle."

A boatman pointed her out to me tacking up slowly with a very light breeze from the north-west. I decided

on going down the bay. Some others, who had friends on board, joined me. As we neared the ship, we observed a number of people on the deck, leaning over to watch approaching boats, or looking through glasses towards the shore. I noticed ribbons and veils blowing about, and wondered which belonged to my girls.

There was a good deal of confusion on board—friends meeting, touters and agents transacting business, passengers preparing for landing.

Two burly fellows stood in the foreground, shaking hands gushingly; their respective lady companions were locked in one another's arms. The four made a good screen, from behind which I glanced round the deck. A group near the binnacle seemed, like myself, spectators of what was going on. Among these I singled out two—one a bright, merry-faced, English-looking girl; the other dark-complexioned and rather sallow, but with a face full of expression, and lit up by magnificent dark eyes, which had that dreamy, far-off look in them that seems to be gazing into some mysterious "beyond."

The fair-haired girl was talking animatedly with her companions; the other, a little apart, surveyed the scene as, holding to the mizen-rigging, she swayed up and down with the motion of the vessel.

In a moment I knew that these were my sisters. How I knew it, or why, I cannot say. Other girls were by, also unclaimed. I scanned them from behind my fleshy screen, but only to be more convinced that the merry girl and the thoughtful girl, so unlike each other, were my sisters.

As I went towards them, the latter let go her hold of the shrouds and looked straight at me.

"*Maggie,*" I heard her say. Before Maggie had turned I was by her side.

"You knew me, Helen," I said. "I cannot be mistaken—you two are Margaret and Helen South."

"And you are brother Fred!" cried Margaret, putting up her face to kiss me.

Helen's hand stole into mine; her eyes were full of tears.

"I am glad you came," she said. "I was feeling lonely. Most of the others have some one to welcome them."

"I've been in town a week waiting for you," I replied.

Our eyes met. We were mutually examining each other. Helen coloured; Margaret smiled; and so did I a little consciously.

"Let me introduce my brother," she said, addressing the lady with whom she had been conversing; then to me, "Mrs. —— has been our kind friend during the voyage, Frederick."

I made my acknowledgments in rather a dazed fashion, feeling as if "Frederick" was some one else, or the "me" of a former state of existence. The name sounded at once strange and familiar; it woke all sorts of odd echoes in my memory. I remembered my school-days, when I had been the "Freddy," who was always in mischief. I remembered my father's grave "Frederick," and the distinct emphasis which the old servants laid on the middle syllable, "Mr. Fred-er-ick."

Helen spoke; her tone was low, but there was the ring of her mother's voice in it. I remembered the evening when I first prevailed on her to call me Fred.

In spite of sentiment, I could not help being amused at my sisters' furtive glances. The comic element prevailed as our eyes again met, and we all three burst out laughing.

"You are disappointed," said I; "now tell me what sort of a Fred you have been mentally manufacturing."

"Tell us first what sort of sisters you have been expecting!" cried Maggie.

"Well, on the whole, you're pretty much what I expected, only Margaret's a little saucier, and Helen a little quieter."

"Then we shall suit you between us," returned Margaret, "we'll give you turn and turn about of chatter and silence; that is, if you're hard to please."

"You'll have to find that out. I don't know myself, because no one has tried to please me. Well, Helen, what do you think of the wild bush brother?" I asked.

"That's just it," she replied, "you *do* look rather wild with that long beard. I think we shall like you, though; but—" and she hesitated.

"But what, Helen?"

"Why, we thought you were brother Fred; but you look like papa Fred."

"No, Helen, his eyes laugh; it's living in the bush has made his hair grey," said Margaret sententiously.

"Ho, ho! I see, you've been manufacturing a grown-up young man brother, forgetting that he was grown up before you were born," and I sent a sigh after bygone reminiscences; but I suspect it was a sigh rather of habit than of regret. The girls interested me.

"Of course we know that," Margaret began. "If we had thought about it, we should have expected to find you older than most girls' grown-up brothers. Somehow we fancied you like them, though."

"But there is often as much difference between the eldest and youngest of the same family as between us," I remarked.

"Yes," replied Helen, "it is a mistake to make things out in your own mind, and then think they must fit; but Maggie and I often do it."

"That's quite a philosophical remark, Miss Nelly. Let me see, you must be nearly sixteen?"

"Oh, Helen is quite learned, and we both mean to

study now we are to live in the country. I'm only just eighteen, you know, Fred; that's not so very old. I might get clever too. Our education was hindered by papa's death," said Margaret, very much in earnest.

I don't think I really understood how isolated I had been until now. I wonder if other people have experienced the same sort of feeling on hearing their Christian name familiarly uttered, after nearly a quarter of a century's disuse. It was a small incident; but I think my sisters' "Fred," drew me closer to them than anything else at our first meeting.

I had been accustomed to sign myself "F. Linley South," and if my acquaintance mentally called me any thing but Doctor South, it would be Linley.

I felt now that I was not a stranger to my sisters; evidently they had been in the habit of thinking and speaking of me as brother Fred. It brought a pleasant sense of belonging to somebody.

However, there was not much time for talking. The vessel was to lie-off that night, and boats were preparing to leave her. I hurried my sisters into one as soon as possible.

It was their first voyage; and both noticed the peculiar sensation common to unaccustomed voyagers on landing.

"How odd it is to walk on firm ground again!" cried Margaret. "I feel as if I must lift my feet quite off the ground at every step. What a nice long pier, only I wish the boards were closer together."

"The noise makes my head ache," Helen remarked.

We were soon in the train. I explained to them where I was taking them for the night.

As we went along they told of their voyage; but we mutually avoided speaking of those who were gone. I had said, "We will have a long talk to-morrow; meeting is enough for one day."

I felt less doubt about leaving them, because they were company for each other; and Margaret plainly was one of those people who are at home anywhere and get on with every one.

Helen is more reserved and shy; but she is very young. Maggie looks after her, and pulls her through publicly; though I have a notion that matters are reversed privately, and that Margaret leans a good deal on Helen.

In a real difficulty I fancy that quiet, shy Helen would hold her own longer than our lively chatty Margaret.

Next day was occupied in getting up the luggage from the ship. Helen, who is not very strong, was tired, and did not care to go out. I spent the evening with them at their lodgings, and heard more of family affairs than I had done since quitting England.

Margaret remembered our father's death, but Helen did not. Their mother's income was small for her position in society. She had decided on retiring to a watering-place in the country, and devoting the money so saved to the education of her daughters. But latterly her health had failed, they were obliged to go to a milder climate, and live among richer invalids, so the education of the girls was necessarily interrupted. All they said showed that they had been trained to regard me as standing in their father's place. The opening of half-closed wounds was agitating, and I left them earlier than I should have done, in order to close a conversation which I perceived was trying to both of them.

We arranged to take next day for seeing a little of Melbourne, and to commence our journey homeward on the following morning.

My sisters, in common with most new arrivals, were surprised to find well-kept streets, handsome buildings,

and good shops in our colonial capital; but I think they were most delighted with the many public gardens around the city.

Flowers are of course rare at this season, but the few that remained were of a lovely freshness, and the trees of a brilliant green.

We rowed up to the Botanical Gardens, and walked back under an avenue of spreading trees to Prince's Bridge.

Certainly those trees have grown wonderfully. When the gardens were first formed that riverside walk was a swamp, and the slope to the Yarra, on the town side, was used as a receptacle for broken bottles, old shoes, and general rubbish.

But I think the greatest improvement has been in the arrangement of the Fitzroy Gardens, now a delightful promenade, but formerly a desert of gullies and heaps, unsightly and dangerous.

The lungs of Melbourne are altogether independent in number of anatomical science.

It should be a healthy city, with the ocean wind blowing on to it, and large public gardens on every side.

A celebrated English pianiste was giving a concert that evening. I thought the girls would gain a fair idea of Melbourne society, by attending it. So we secured tickets.

Margaret had heard the principal artiste some years before at Bath; but she, as well as Helen, was delighted with the music and the appearance which the handsome hall presented, filled to overflowing with an appreciative audience.

As for me, I have lived so long out of the world, that I have grown either too idle or too boorish for general society.

The wonderful dresses and overpowering head-gear of

the ladies bewildered me—the lights, the company, the music, it was all bewildering together.

I began to think of our concerts at Teb-Teb, in the tent doors, under the star-lit sky, where half-clad diggers made both orchestra and audience.

Wasn't it horrid to be bestridden with a nightmare of Jew's harps and accordions amid such elegant surroundings?

Presently, however, my attention was fixed. My favourite song, played as though some lovely, lonely spirit possessed the instrument; its rich tones, voicelike in expression, filled the room—a very wail of love and sorrow.

> "When true hearts are broken, and loved ones are gone,
> Ah! who would inhabit this cold world alone!"

A few times in my life I have heard a perfect instrument perfectly played, and have felt that it expressed the sentiment of the song better than words could have done.

Towards the close of the concert Doctor Wyse came to us; he said he had come to fetch his wife home.

I introduced my sisters, and he asked us to join Mrs. Wyse's party, and finish the evening at his house.

I was about to decline, as we were to start early next morning; but my new responsibilities made themselves felt. The girls ought to know some ladies. While I hesitated, Doctor Wyse and Margaret settled the point by walking off together; there was nothing for it but to follow with Helen. Mrs. Wyse was very kind; she seemed to feel a pity for the motherless girls; Helen won on her as Maggie did on her husband. After supper she carried them off to her room; during their absence the doctor said, "From what you have told me of Mial, it does not appear to be exactly the place for young English ladies to fix their home in, it's neither so prosperous as a reef

district would be, nor so settled as an agricultural one; I wonder you don't leave it.

"Leave Mial!" I replied; "such an idea never occurred to me. I'm not specially in love with the district, but I'm afraid I'm in love with an easy-going, quiet life. Don't add to the series of shocks my nerves have been undergoing lately, by bringing forward another element of disturbance."

"My dear fellow, a medical man can't be lazy, however much talent he may have for idleness. Haven't you often to ride something over or under fifty miles in all weathers, and through all sorts of roads?"

"But that's my habit of life; what I mean by laziness is a disinclination for any change. I go along my groove mechanically, without much effort."

"If you think about it," said the doctor, "I fancy you'll find that the groove has got a hitch in it just now, which has thrown you a little out; my advice to you is, don't settle into it again unless there are very good reasons."

"A very good reason is that I'm not fit for any other, neither do I know any other that's fit for me."

The doctor pulled out a letter from his pocket, saying, "I should not have named the subject to you, but for this, which I received this morning; it's from Brown, of Bulla; he's neither so young nor so needy as he used to be, and he wants to give up his practice at Lakeville, it's about ten miles from Bulla, he's plenty to do nearer home; but what he dislikes is a snob of a fellow stepping in and being his nearest neighbour. He's got one of that sort on the other side of Bulla, whose conduct has been so unprofessional that Brown declines to meet him in consultation, another at Lakeville would be too much. He now asks me to look about quietly for a suitable man. It's an excellent opening, populous district—agricultural,

you know—and has the advantage of being near Bulla; nicest town out of Melbourne, to my mind, superior society, just the place for the young ladies."

I sighed. Was this the beginning of the end? at any rate, there was an end of the peace I had promised myself in returning home. Now it was pointed out to me, I couldn't but see that Mial was not a suitable residence for my sisters. I felt that henceforth I should be beset by misgivings and doubts as to what was best to be done. The element of change had been introduced, to what would it lead?

These thoughts passed rapidly through my mind while Doctor Wyse was speaking.

He perceived my disinclination to face the idea suggested, and said,—

"Think the matter over, I won't make the offer to any one else till I hear from you, there's time enough between this and Christmas. Brown doesn't mind about giving up until the end of the year."

I thanked Doctor Wyse warmly, the more warmly because it occurred to me that I had been dreaming about my own feelings when I ought to have showed some gratitude for his confidence in me and friendly desire to do me a service.

As we took leave, I promised to consider what he had said, and to let him know my decision in a short time.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ballarat.—Deep mining.—"Whose is all this land?"—Janet's reception.—Pros and cons.

THE journey now made with my sisters was very different from my first journey to Mial. They took travelling by train as a matter of course. I don't think it occurred to them that there was any other way of getting from one end of a country to the other.

I had determined to go *viâ* Ballarat, and give the girls a chance of seeing a little of the Golden City.

The term is applicable, so far as it refers to the "*creation*" of Ballarat, but scarcely to its present condition.

It was certainly "*made*" by the gold, but now it maintains its position in the main pretty much as other towns do.

There are a few fairly profitable mines, worked in a systematic manner, either let on tribute to parties of miners, who pay a certain percentage on the gold raised, or carried on by companies. Some give good dividends still, others are as yet worked at a loss, in hope of striking payable quartz. It is thought that almost unlimited quantities of this are to be found in Ballarat East, and about the Black Hill. Under the present system of mining management, payable results seem only possible from rich quartz, yet it has been shown that a carefully managed company can pay fair dividends with a yield of only three pennyweights to the ton.

The truth is, our gold-mines are managed much as our other sources of public wealth have been. It is time that a more prudent system were introduced.

Our stay in Ballarat was short, so we divided our attention between a few of the more prominent objects of interest.

In Mial there are no large quartz mines. I therefore now availed myself of the opportunity of visiting one while my sisters accompanied the wife of an old friend of mine, now living at Ballarat, to inspect some of the charitable institutions of the town.

They returned much pleased with what they had seen.

It happened to be pay-day with the Ladies' Committee for superintending the boarding-out of neglected children from the Industrial Schools, which offered an occasion for seeing something of the working of this system. It has been adopted in order to relieve the crowded central schools, and to give some of the children a chance of being trained in the family circle for their future duties. A number of ladies supervise the families in which they are boarded, and continue to interest themselves in the young people after they are apprenticed out to service. Several of these children accompanied the foster-parents, who came to receive their monthly pay.

"They looked like other children," Margaret remarked, "not like those prim, unnatural little things who attended our church at home, in mob caps and white aprons. One of the ladies told us that these children had a hard, defiant air about them at first, though they are well treated at the schools; but when a number are collected together, of course it's impossible that there can be much home feeling."

"I think," said Helen, "Ballarat deserves to be called the Golden City—it follows the golden rule of charity.

We went to the Orphan Asylum and Hospital, both large, airy buildings, at opposite ends of the town. In the Orphan Asylum some of the inmates pay, and some do not, but there is no difference made between them. In the children's ward, at the hospital, we saw a lady who had brought some toys to a little girl quite paralyzed; her eyes seemed the only part of her alive; but they looked delighted, and laughed quite plainly, when the lady pulled the toys about and played with them on the bed, before the little sufferer. "I think Ballarat is a kind place," continued Helen; "and I hope the second bottoming will be successful."

We laughed at the connexion between Orphan Asylums and second bottoming.

"O, you may laugh!" cried Helen, "but I know about second bottoming; they are trying deeper down, for reefs of quartz, with gold in it; and they ought to find it because they'll use it well."

"We'll hope so at any rate," said I, "though I don't know quite so much of the Ballarat people as you seem to do; but my enthusiastic little sister must remember that others of our colonial towns have charitable institutions, though she has not happened to see them. Melbourne has a full share, so have most of the larger places."

The friend in whose company my sisters had made their morning inspection interposed.

"A continual call on our charity here," said she, "is the great number of deserted families. When the men cannot get as high wages as they expect, they go off to seek employment elsewhere, or follow new rushes, leaving their families dependent on public charity. There is so little sense of family responsibility here, and it is almost impossible to trace these deserters in order to compel them to perform their part."

"One of the consequences of our migratory condition,"

I remarked; "but things are improving even in that direction."

The girls next told me of their visit to the Botanical Gardens, and of the delightful row they had on Lake Wendouree, where they had watched the taking of some heavy hauls of fine perch, the fish in some cases being of enormous size.

I fear I gave great offence by calling Lake Wendouree "the Swamp." I believe the girls thought I was imposing on their credulity by describing its appearance when it was truly the swamp.

On the whole they were greatly pleased with Ballarat; it being so much smaller than Melbourne, they were able in a short time to get a better idea of it, and, having recovered their terra-firma associations, were more in a condition for observing than they had been on their first landing. We were to drive from Ballarat to Mial, and on the way I described to them what I had seen at the mine in the morning.

First there was an enormous mass of white gravel, at one end of it a framework of timber forty feet in height, a large wooden shaft in the centre, up and down which buckets full of earth from the mine are continually passing. Near by is the engine-house with its tall brick chimney, inside which is a windlass. The two ends of the rope round it pass through an opening in the wall to the top of the framework, and thence over iron pulleys down into the shaft, which is divided into two compartments for the passage of the buckets. These are large boxes mounted on wheels. About half-way up the frame is a flat stage where the buckets are landed. This stage is fitted with tramways to facilitate the emptying of the buckets. The machinery is so well arranged that a bucket is raised from the mine, emptied, and lowered again in about two minutes.

When, instead of waste earth, quartz is sent up, the bucket is placed on a different line of tramway and carried by the same machinery to the stampers, or crushing mill. These stampers are huge, heavy hammers, worked by the engine. They number from six to twelve in a row, and fall, one after another, into a long iron box, of which the front is lower than the sides or back. This box is kept supplied with quartz, which is broken and pounded up by the stampers. A stream of water flows into the box and is dashed about by the stampers, running out at the front. The stampers mingle the quartz thoroughly with the water, which carries all together over an inclined plane into a lower trough. The larger pieces of gold fall to the bottom of the first trough. Blankets are stretched across the inclined plane to catch the smaller particles. Nearly all the gold is thus secured, and any that escapes the roughness of the blankets is caught in the lower trough. About every four hours the stampers are stopped from working, when the troughs and blankets are cleared of their precious deposit. The refuse quartz is carried away from the last trough as sludge. If a creek be near it finds its way thither, polluting the stream for many miles. If there is no creek, it drains to the lowest ground, and remains an unsightly plain of mud, to be changed, perhaps, in the course of centuries into an alluvial flat where corn and vegetables may grow after gold-washing has ceased to be remunerative.

The girls were disappointed that I had not gone down into the mine. I promised, however, on a future occasion, to take them to see one of the large quartz mines at Clunes, where the machinery is of a very superior character.

Skirting this district, we now came round by the forest, which stretches in every direction, and greatly impressed my English-bred companions.

"What strikes me most," said Margaret, "is the sense of space, the boundless expanse on all sides; one wants to expand the lungs to take in a supply of this pure air," and she opened her mouth, drawing a long breath.

"Oh, Maggie, I wish some of our poor people were here!" cried Helen; "why, there's room enough for hundreds!"

"For thousands, Helen; but it costs a lot of money to come out, you know."

"Couldn't they borrow, and pay back afterwards? Whose is all this land?" asked Helen.

"It belongs to the Queen, or the country, or the people; you can take your choice of owners, according to whether you are a royalist, a patriot, or a democrat," I replied. "But it's very easily bought up; the State is a liberal landlord, not to say wasteful."

"How do they sell it?"

"Oh, there are several ways; in auriferous districts any one can take out what is called a 'miner's right;' that is a quarter acre of land, the rent of which is five shillings a year. A man with a wife and family, or a widow with children, can take up the same quantity at the same rate for each member of his family, the only condition being that it must be made use of. Generally it is taken for a homestead, a house built, a garden laid out, a paddock enclosed, in size according to the number of quarter acres his family circle has enabled the occupier to claim. When all is done, if he is in a position to buy, he applies to have the place put up for sale; it is seldom that the lessee is bidden against; but if it does happen that any one else buys it, the purchaser must pay the original lessee the full value of every improvement he has made, and a compensation over and above."

"So a man may build confidently; he can't be a loser.

Meantime, he has no rent to pay, except the five shillings a year for each piece of land."

"Why, Helen, are you going to turn out a Miss Martineau on my hands?"

"I don't know about Miss Martineau; but if I were the Queen, I would lend the poor people money to come here, and let them pay back by degrees, when corn and things grew on the land."

"Helen, I retract the compliment, and beg Miss Martineau's pardon, she would never have talked about *corn* and *things*. To grow corn alone would require more land than can be taken under a miner's right: for this there are certain districts open to what is called free selection. In these any one may select 320 acres of land, and the same quantity for every adult member of his family. For this two shillings per acre annually is paid. At the end of ten years the land becomes his own property, the upset price of one pound per acre having been paid in instalments during the rental of ten years; the only condition is that certain improvements be made, and a residence occupied on the place."

"That is a capital way of helping people," said Helen.

"Perhaps you won't think so when you see how it works," I replied. "But here we are in sight of Mial." [1]

We ascended the hill that overlooks the township.

"Which is your house, Fred?" cried both my companions at once.

"It is just on the side of that ridge; but you can't see it yet."

[1] These conversations, or any that follow on public affairs generally, must *not* be regarded as put forward with any political view. They are neither full enough nor precise enough for that. They are simply the transcript of conversations which actually occurred between a lady and gentleman when the former made her first acquaintance with the country districts of Victoria.

"What a clean-looking town! the atmosphere seems so clear that the smoke from those chimneys disperses almost as soon as it appears."

"It's thick enough with dust in summer," I said.

"What buildings are those?" asked Margaret, pointing to the high mounds of red gravel along a row of old claims. The slanting rays of the setting sun fell on these, giving them the appearance of fantastic buildings in red stone.

"They're only heaps of gravel, thrown out of old shafts."

"Why do they suggest the ruins of Petra to my mind; there can be no likeness; where is the connexion?" asked Margaret.

"Edom, red; excavations; example of latent association, Maggie," I replied.

"Halloo, Nero, old boy! Get out of the way, sir," for in the exuberance of his joy the dog was frightening the horses.

In another moment Andy was at their heads.

Janet stood at the gate full of exclamations. What with Nero and Janet and the girls, there was a general hubbub until the horses had gone round, and we found ourselves on the verandah.

By that time Nero and Janet had subsided, the former kept close to me, pushing his great head against me, and insisting on monopolizing my attention; the latter was cautiously examining the girls, and critically eyeing my costume.

I thought the cottage looked cosy; its broad verandah covered with creepers, and the glint of the bright wood fire shining through the open door.

"Well, Janet, it looks homelike and comfortable," I said.

"I'm glad to hear ye say it, Doctor South, the mair so as I see ye've grown grand-like."

It was a covert hit at my modern head gear.

"You've become rather fine too, Janet," and I glanced at the new curtains and chair covers she had introduced.

"Weel, sir, I considered ye'd wish the leddies to find things dacent-like."

"I'm sure it's very nice," interrupted Margaret; "look, Helen, what splendid geraniums, and this is winter here."

"Yes, the days are warm, but the evenings chilly; let us go in," I said.

I fancied my sisters appeared a little disappointed, though both made an effort to seem pleased with every thing. The effort, somehow, was apparent; and since they have grown accustomed to the place they have acknowledged that it struck them as very small and ill-furnished at first.

Accustomed to an English home, they must miss many things to which they have been used; but they do not appear to mind; on the contrary, are quite happy and satisfied.

They have altered the arrangements of their own room, and coaxed Janet to assist in resettling our sitting-room.

Margaret is installed as mistress of our little establishment; she was housekeeper at home during the latter years of her mother's life, and already the arrangements of our table, and general air of the place, show tokens of refinement and good taste in the presiding household genius. She is Janet's favourite, and can do as she pleases with the old woman, who has yielded her authority cheerfully, and matters go on quite smoothly indoors. I cannot say I am much upset, or that my personal habits are interfered with.

It is lonely for the girls here certainly; but their

minds are sufficiently cultivated to make them in a degree independent of outward society. We have two wants, a better choice of books, and a piano, both which I must endeavour to supply if we remain here. If! I cannot make up my mind whether to accept Doctor Wyse's offer or not.

There now, the ever-recurring subject has cropped up again! I thought to baffle it to-night by recommencing this writing; but I must take my pipe as usual, and pace the garden, cogitating the pros and cons of the proposed change.

CHAPTER XIV.

Free selectors.—The land sham.—Tara's Hall.—How gold is got.—Nor even a ghost.—There is always the chance of a find.

A FORTNIGHT has elapsed since I finished my last writing. I have not now so many lonely hours as formerly. When I am at home my sisters claim me; one or both of them will frequently ride with me in my visit to distant patients; altogether I am becoming quite domesticated.

Having brought my sketches down to the present time, I shall henceforth only record the outlines of our family history, special incidents which happen to us, and descriptions of our new home, for I have at last decided to leave Mial at the end of this year. The more I see of my sisters, the more I feel that they ought to be differently placed.

Helen is anxious to carry on her education. Margaret is of a social disposition. It is hard at their age to be shut out from the society of their equals, and to miss opportunities of improvement.

Altogether, I see that it is right I should make this effort for their sakes. Indeed, it is less of an effort than I expected. The change in our home-life has swept off a good many of the cobwebs which hung about me. The girls' talk provides the mental friction of which I was sadly in need. I feel less reluctant to face the world now.

I have written to Dr. Wyse, telling him of my decision, and shall occupy the few months that remain to us here in making necessary arrangements.

When I told my sisters of our proposed move they were pleased.

We feared that Andy and Janet would object to leave the place where Wattie lies.

However, that was less of a difficulty than we expected. After travelling so many thousand miles to be near him, they think nothing of a few score miles in the same country.

"Who knows, Miss Margaret, but when the master's once began moving he'll be at it again?" said Janet: "and ye were saying it's by the sea we're going. He can't go farther, you know, so maybe he'll turn about and come back nearer. Anyhow, he's promised to lay our bones by Wattie. We'll trust the rest and go with you."

Andy disliked leaving his vines; but, as Janet remarked,—

"If one can leave the grave, sure the vines is of small account."

So it is settled that we all migrate westward at the end of this year. Meantime, my sisters take an interest in seeing as much of this part of the country as possible.

Helen and I made a visit last week to some free selectors. We have some pretty fair specimens of the three classes into which they may be divided.

The *few*, who have secured a handsome property; the *many*, who struggle on, borrowing money and vainly fighting against the difficulty of insufficient capital; and those who never had any other object than to compel the squatter on whose run they have selected to buy them out.

Graham, whom we first visited, has a large family, several of them grown up. He took up his 320 acres on

part of a run. Those of his children who are eligible have selected as much as they can get on adjoining blocks, making out their quantity in other parts of the district. They had a little capital, sufficient to keep them out of the hands of the banks or storekeepers. All were able and willing to work. The men fenced, built, drained, and planted; the boys looked after sheep and cattle on the poorer land; the women and girls helped with the dairy and poultry-yard. Now they have a fine estate of nearly 1500 acres, all clear and in excellent order.

The elder children have married; the younger have been well educated. The old people live in ease and enjoy every luxury.

Helen was highly delighted with what she saw here, and came away fully resolved to uphold free selection as a universal panacea for extinguishing strikes and making everybody contented.

From Graham's we went to Merry's. Here we found a house half finished, the family huddled into a couple of rooms neither lined nor ceiled, broken fences, make-shift gates, badly-cultivated land, poor cattle. Mrs. Merry looked haggard and untidy; the children were half naked, utterly ignorant—young savages, in fact. Merry himself downhearted and weary with the struggle which he has been carrying on for years. He and Graham came at the same time. Merry's brother was with him. They selected near Graham. At first the Merrys worked with a will; but they had scarcely any capital, and were obliged to borrow. Two dry seasons came one after another. Graham was pushed, but he had enough to enable him to hold on and wait. A good season set him up again. The Merrys, on the contrary, living from hand to mouth, could not afford to wait; they got involved deeper and deeper.

Bill Merry, the unmarried brother, gave in, and forfeited his land. John has held on, every year getting poorer

and more discouraged. It's only a question of time; he must give in, and his children will have grown up uneducated, ill-trained, his own temper soured, his wife's health destroyed. Had he continued to receive wages, he would have saved money, and his family would have been cared for; but the temptation of owning land and being his own master was too great. He tried it too soon, and it has ruined him.

"What do you think of free selection now?" asked I, as we rode out through Merry's broken slip-rail.

"I think the Queen should lend them money to begin, as I said before, Fred," cried Helen.

"Trust a woman for sticking to her opinion. Whether it's right or wrong is of no consequence,—hey, Helen?"

"I don't see that the system is proved to be bad because some people are not in a position to profit by it," she replied. "It *must* be a good thing for poor people to make homes of their own. Why, the very hope of it must be good for them!"

"But they are not able if they have not capital. Land is of no use to people if they cannot make a living out of it. It's bad for the country that people should settle on it who cannot get its full worth out of the soil.

"Good-day, doctor," interrupted a voice at that moment, and our police magistrate rode up. "Times are changed with you; one seldom sees you alone now. How does Nero approve?"

"Nero is growing old, and isn't sorry to have an excuse for staying at home, though he makes believe he wants to accompany the horses."

"An age of shams; even dogs don't escape the infection."

"We're discussing the land sham," I replied. "Helen is in love with our system, and wants to import half the labouring population of Europe."

"Hum, I'm a Government officer, so I'll say nothing; but I'll tell you, Miss Helen, a circumstance that came under my own eye. I was riding along the metal road they're making yonder, not long ago with the shire engineer. A good many of the men were about. I noticed one well-made fellow, who held his head different from the rest; something about him attracted my attention. I can't tell you, doctor," he continued, turning to me, "how shocked I was when I saw his face; it was Loady, who once had Spring Run Station. Miss Helen, I remember that man selling one of his stations for seventy thousand pounds money down."

"But what did he do with it?" asked Helen incredulously.

"He speculated, and lost a great deal; then he went again into squatting; but the era of selectors had set in; his own servants (some of them) took up blocks close to his very door-step. Many of them, quite without capital, only selected in order to be bought out; he did this at first, but that brought a shoal of loafers on to the run; he got involved with the agencies just when wool began to rise; they foreclosed, and he was turned out of the station a ruined man."

"I knew he had come to grief, but I didn't know it was so bad as that," I said. "What a shame it is! and he one of the pioneers of the settlement."

"Yes, the squatters opened the country, and endured great hardships in the old days; but all that's forgotten now."

"It's very hard about Mr. Loady," Helen remarked, "and I'm sorry for him; but you see he *did* get 70,000*l.* for his station; so he hadn't worked altogether for nothing."

"Well, Miss Helen, I could name some who got nothing, but have seen their runs taken up, bit by bit,

till their very garden was selected. So you see if free selection is a boon to one class, it is an injury to another."

"Any way, there's plenty of ground," she persisted. "Why don't the squatters select too, and begin again?"

"If they do, they must employ dummies, which is illegal, the quantity of land being insufficient for their purpose," I said.

"You, Fred, and Mr.——," she replied, turning to our companion, "have lived among these squatters; and that makes you both a little one-sided in judging between them and the poorer class. Only look at Graham; I daresay there are more like him than like Merry."

We shook our heads; she went on, "It must be a grand thing to raise a whole family, and make them princes in the land."

"Graham is a man who would have done well anywhere," the magistrate remarked, as he took leave. "I see Miss Helen is an out-and-out partisan."

"Arguing about the land as usual," cried Margaret, who had come to meet us; "for my part, I expect to see Helen taking out a miner's right herself some day."

"Well, she can't until she's one and twenty, that's one comfort; and we shall be due for another change in the land laws before that," I replied.

"I don't think any laws that could be made would be fair to everybody; of course there are 'ins and outs' in everything; but that which benefits most people must be best," Helen said, with that superb contempt of detail peculiar to her sex.

Yesterday the girls came in laughing, "Fred, will you take us to Tara's Hall? we've heard the harp that hangs there, not neglected, but making noisy music still."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Lor, sir," cries Janet, "Miss Margaret heard the new ingine in Tara's Hall, and she calls it a harp."

Tara's Hall is one of the earlier claims lately re-opened here. I had a patient near, so we all walked over this afternoon. On our way we crossed the old alluvial ground that the Chinamen are re-washing with fairly payable results.

Near by were a party of four Europeans, re-washing also on some deserted ground. The plan they had adopted struck me as economical and ingenious.

The original diggers had here dug a long ditch—something on the principle of an aqueduct—to conduct the water from a large dam to their ground. The present party have made use of this ditch so far as suits their convenience; then, damming it up, they have diverted the little stream into a calico pipe, about five inches in diameter, which conveys it, with very little waste, over the inequalities of the ground, a distance of sixty or seventy yards, to the place at which they are digging. Here they have a wooden trough, about a foot square, and perhaps thirty feet long, one end of which is considerably higher than th e other, an inclination of about one in ten. This is furnished with a moveable false bottom, pierced with holes, throughout its length, to admit of the gold falling through, while the water carries off the earthy material.

The upper end of the trough is about two feet above the mouth of the calico pipe, though, of course, on a lower level than the dam from whence it comes.

An inclined plane is laid—just a single board about nine feet long—from the upper end of the trough, and the calico pipe placed upon it. Slight as is the material, it suffices to conduct the water up the inclined plane into the trough, a full stream rushing through the latter with considerable force.

The men throw the earth, a kind of coarse, clayey gravel, into the trough, and the rush of water carries it through, with only the occasional help of a shovel to

prevent a stoppage. The gold falls through the holes in the moveable bottom and is found resting against ledges, placed to receive it, in the fixed bottom. This is cleared out every evening, and a remunerative quantity of the precious metal found there. These calico pipes have been known to carry water over a rise of five feet. The girls were a little disappointed in Tara's Hall claim, there being less to be seen above ground than they expected, and the claim itself not being of sufficient importance to afford conveniences for visitors descending.

Passing through a wire fence we came into a shady paddock, with a quantity of young gum-trees, growing in clumps, which gives it a park-like air. A narrow path, overhung by trees, leads to a ridge at the upper end of the paddock. Here is erected a small engine-house which had lately received the new *Ingine*, the pride of our township. The claim is about ninety feet deep, worked at three levels. Standing at the top you see two well-like holes, boarded at the sides, and connected with the scaffolding above by pulleys and an iron pump. These are worked by the engine, which lowers and raises two iron cages containing buckets, or rather large square boxes, in each of which about three hundred weight of earth is sent up and by which the men descend.

The scaffolding is erected above the mouth of the claim, over and surrounded by a quantity of rubbish, which is the refuse thrown out. It is about forty feet in height. The first stage, which is about ten feet from the top, has two large round cisterns, provided with iron forks. The gold dirt is thrown into these and the iron arms set going by the engine, which at the same time pumps water into the cisterns. The dirt is thus thoroughly pounded up, then forced into a large box at the side with a moveable false bottom pierced with holes; water is turned in here liberally, and it is well washed. The sludge is let out by

a wooden sluice, and the gold falls through to the fixed bottom. The claim is surrounded by this sludge, which looks precisely like wet sand when the tide is out, and covers (I should think) an acre of ground.

The week before our visit about fifty ounces of gold had been raised, which sells at four pounds two shillings the ounce, it being of the very finest quality, but the tributers working the claim complained that they were making very little, having to pay twenty-five per cent. of all the gold raised to the proprietors. However, now the improved machinery has been put up, they hope Tara's Hall will yet become more productive and important.

"Alas, for the sentiment that hangs about that pathetic lament!" said Maggie, as we left the place; "it will now always be associated in my mind with noise, and smoke, and heaps of dirt, and men in ochre-coloured clothes, with faces to match. It really was barbarous to call the claim by that name."

"And yet it is meant as a compliment to the song. How do you know but the old hero dabbled in the philosopher's stone and tried his hand at transmuting? Perhaps he wouldn't be so much offended at our more laborious modern way of getting gold."

"Fred, you've no romance!" cried Margaret. "I don't think anybody has in this bare new land. Why, you haven't even a ghost!"

"I am glad Helen has not remarked on my anachronism," I replied; "but as to ghosts, we really have one, only he's in Sydney."

"A ghost in Sydney! Tell us the story!" cried both girls.

"Oh, you can read it in any book about the colony. It involves a story of murder, and when I pass this way I think of murder without going so far as Sydney to be reminded of it."

"Why do you think of murder here?" Helen inquired.

"You see that bit of a valley that the railway-bridge is to cross," I said, pointing to a scrubby dell, with a creek running through on our left. "Soon after I came to Mial I was fetched in a hurry to a station about twenty miles across country. The man who came for me undertook to show a short cut through the forest. There were no fences then as there are now. As we came down that descent we noticed a fire and a good deal of smoke. Presently we saw a man by the fire stooping over something. When he perceived us he made at first as though he would show fight, but thought better of it, and made off through the scrub. We captured him, however. He was tried and got his deserts."

"But what was he doing?"

"Well, I don't care to enter into particulars," I replied; "but he had killed a man, and was in the act of burning the body."

"Oh, Fred, how dreadful!"

"Yes; I often think of it when I pass this place, which now wears such a peaceable, civilized appearance."

"Ye're showing the ladies the lights o' other days, doctor!" cried a voice from the top of the hill tunnel as we passed. Looking up, we saw Jack the Fopicker, as he was always called. Jack was a character in his way. He was very musical. Stray leaves from old song-books and scraps of music might be seen peeping from his pockets or lying with his pick and cradle.

"We've been to Tara's Hall, Jack," I said.

"Ah! there's more noise there now but less work than when we called it after the old song. We didn't want no ingines a puffing and snorting; we washed out our gold, *like men*, ten pounds a day the common haul, besides you're chance of a big nugget. The light of other days is faded, indeed!" and Jack commenced to hum the tune.

"Do you mean to say you got ten pounds a day?" asked Helen, surveying the singer curiously.

He was quick to understand her thought. "I don't *look* like it, do I, miss?" he said. "Life's a bumper,—*after* it's quaffed, you understand." Again he hummed a few bars. Presently breaking off he said, "No more bumpers for me; it's fifteen pence a week now, hey?"

"Is that about the wages you're making, Jack?" I asked.

"Some weeks a little over, some a little under; strike an average at fifteen pence. A bumper, ain't it, doctor?"

"Why don't you give it up?"

"Well, sir, 'twould be an insult to the old ground for Jack to abandon it; and there always *is* the chance of a lucky find, you know."

"What did you do with your ten pounds a day?" Margaret asked.

"Well, miss, there was so many of us in like case, I can't say exactly how the money went; but 'twas light come and light go. Why, there were 50,000 people on this ground in the great rush. Before that I knew every soul on Mial, and so did the doctor too. Nobody ever knew '*my*' name, though—no, not one. Before I left the old home, they bid me keep myself to myself, and I've done it. In the drink or out of it, for all these years, I've never told my name. *Never*," he repeated, emphatically; "but I shall tell *you*, doctor, some day."

"All right, Jack," I replied, laughing, as we walked on.

"Is that true about the ten pounds a day, and the 50,000 people?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, the first rush was fully that; the second not over 20,000, I should say."

"Dear me, Mial is very different now!" she remarked.

"If the claims they are now washing over, turned out any quantity of rich stuff, or if a few big nuggets were

found, we should have another rush," I said. "A digging population is always migratory, and sensitive in the highest degree. One might fancy they scented gold afar off, as cattle scent water. Before the finders of a good lump have well unearthed it, strangers are on the ground taking up claims on every side."

"Don't you think it is something like gambling, Fred?"

"Certainly it infatuates men. One of the worst features of a digger's life is the unsettled state of mind it induces. There is always the chance of a find, and that chance leads them on when they're not making enough to keep either themselves or their families. I believe Mial will turn out more gold yet. I shouldn't be surprised at a rush any day; then fortunes would be again made. Meanwhile, a good many are wasting their lives and injuring their families."

"If fortunes are made in a rush, why should reticent Jack, who has shared in two rushes, be still poor and in rags?"

"Ask the publicans, especially in the large towns. If my experience of Victoria has taught me nothing else, at least I have learned that sudden wealth is no boon to men untrained to exercise moral restraint. Apart from the question of *using* riches well, our diggers have not got their fair share of enjoyment out of the gold. Of course there are exceptions, and I don't regard it as a matter of education only. Some of the worst specimens of the gold-digger I ever met, were what is called educated men, but they had not the true culture which helps to self-restraint."

"Wouldn't you base both on religion?" Margaret asked.

"When that is real, I suppose it amounts to the same thing; but I've seen some very religious men thrown off their balance by a lucky find."

"Perhaps they were not *really* religious men, Fred—only talkers."

"Oh, I don't know. I never inquire into the state of people's souls; their bodies are my business."

Jack the Fopicker had been leisurely strolling homeward in our rear. As we approached Mial he came up to us.

"Have ye been through Teb-Teb lately, doctor?" he said.

"No, the track is so cut up by the sluicing that I generally go round by the lower road," I replied.

"I was through them ranges a bit agone," said Jack, "and I tell yer I felt mighty queer all by myself there, with the leavings of thousands about me. Sort of all-overishness, I fancy, like as how I expects to feel when I'm dead—just at first, you understand, before one gets used to being a ghost."

We laughed as we bid Jack good night, and Margaret gravely said to him,—

"If I were you, I would take other work, and not go on digging at fifteen pence a week."

He shook his head and walked away humming his favourite song—at once a pæan on the glories of the past and a lament over the failures of the present.

CHAPTER XV.

Nature at work again.—Deserted diggings.—Margaret and Helen.—A pertinacious little thing.—Confessions.—A new start.

After our talk with Jack, the reticent one (as Margaret called him), she and Helen frequently expressed a wish to visit the Teb-Teb ranges before leaving Mial.

"To try how 'all-overishness' feels, I suppose," I had said, and one afternoon when business called me beyond the lower road, I proposed they should accompany me, and we would ride through the ranges, as both girls were now expert horsewomen.

Leaving Mial on our left, we struck into the Forest Hill track. At first the ascent is gentle, rise after rise sloping upwards, opening at each swelling summit into park-like glades dotted with young trees. A slight descent succeeds; and then a similar rise, culminating in a like glade. The country is of this character to the top of the range, only as you get on to the mountains it becomes more broken, large masses of stone having worn away and rolled over the sides.

The trees were so thick about us that our forward view was always bounded by the approaching rise. The girls continually expected it to open, but were continually mistaken. When the near ascent was achieved, another precisely similar would be found fronting us. Yet the ride was not monotonous. Through the trees we caught

glimpses of swelling undulations, latticed in leaves of green and gold, hanging from boughs of rich crimson. The coloured sunlight slanting through traced shifting patterns on the soft green sward. The yellow acacia was in brilliant flower, and the young gums wore their spring dress of dark red. Where the forest opened a little we got a view of the mountain peaks which environ it, some bare and jagged, others round-topped, and covered with short grass, others again so thickly timbered that their outline is lost in a dark mass which seems to melt into the purple sky.

Not a human being, not an animal, only a few parrots disturbed by the sound of our horses' feet whirling above us with shrill cry, or a pair of shining eyes looking out from one of the older trees belonging to a frightened opossum, who would go scrambling along the trunk to hide in a hollow of the bark.

"This must have been a fine forest at one time," said Helen, "many of the old stumps are of great girth."

"Yes, there were some noble trees here," I replied; "but a few thousand miners, with their attendant suttlers, soon make havoc of a forest."

Margaret drew our attention to the singular effect produced by young shoots springing from old trunks.

"I couldn't think," said she, "what gave them this odd look. I see now, it is the great girth of the ancient stump out of which grow these spreading bushes. The short, shrub-like appearance of the living top contrasts strangely with the large circumference of the dead trunk."

"Look!" cried Helen, "many of these appear to have been burned as well as cut down, and yet have since put out afresh; that one—pointing to a gigantic, hollow stump, flaunting its young shoots in the breeze—that one is black with decay, it must be thirty feet round at least,

at a distance one might take it for a fresh young shrub."

"There is great vitality in these gums," I remarked. "But here we are on Teb-Teb."

We crossed a deep sluice cut from a large dam, and flowing downwards across the rise, in many places it was choked with stones and earth; but it represented a large amount of labour. This was the boundary of an open space, perforated with holes in every direction, by the side of which were the inevitable heaps of red gravel, sand, or pipe-clay.

Some of the holes are very deep, retaining a good deal of water. Farther on, we came on a quartz hillock, large masses of pink and white glittering in the sun, smaller pieces broken up occasioning our horses some trouble in treading among them.

Here we dismounted, the girls insisting on trying their chance of finding a nugget, and burdening themselves with pieces of quartz, streaked with yellow, which they were much disappointed to find was only mundic.

We crept a little way into an old tunnel; but soon found it too much choked, and not very safe. Opposite it was a large shaft, the wooden machinery of the horse whimsey which had worked it still remaining. A portion of the disused timber framework had fallen away, and now lay stained and moss-grown on the ground.

We sat down on a piece of it, and surveyed the scene.

"Well, I confess it feels ghostly; I shouldn't like to be here alone!" exclaimed Margaret.

"These deserted diggings all look alike; weird and dreary," I said.

"But here the contrast to the fresh budding life of the forest strikes one painfully," Helen remarked; "man labours, builds, and toils, and lo! a desolate graveyard.

Nature rests, receives, and waits, and lo! fresh, glorious life."

"Isn't that a paraphrase of what we read about Asia and Europe in Tancred?" asked Margaret.

"Pray don't grow sentimental, girls!" I entreated. "We are not far from the top of this peak; let us remount."

Proceeding upward, we came on the remnant of a chimney of piled quartz; and a few broken slabs indicating where a hut had once stood.

"These remains," said Margaret, "do not rise to the dignity of ruins; they rather suggest the idea of a large population, seized with an universal panic which prompted them to sudden flight."

"The panic was, I expect, report of a new rush! But here we reach the table-land. Take a good look, girls, for we shan't come again."

Before us was a narrow valley, the soil of which appeared to be a sort of volcanic loam. Large boulders lay about; a cottage nestled in the valley with a fine orchard at the back, cultivated land stretched down the narrow strip and half way up the hills which environed it.

"What a lonely spot for a house!" cried Helen.

"*Bah!* bah!" shrieked a mocking voice from behind.

We started; and, turning quickly, perceived a little girl close to us, holding in her arms a tiny white kid.

Helen looked as if she suspected her to be a phantom child, in keeping with the scene.

"What is your name, little girl?" I asked, for the farm had been selected since I was last in this place.

"I'm Susan Green; and this is our Jenny's kid; mother sent me to fetch her in."

"Does your mother live there?"

"Yes, father's a s'lector; but we're English," she explained, with some pride.

"I should have liked to have gone to see 'mother,'" said Helen, as we retraced our steps; "surely she must fit somehow with the romantic spot she lives in."

"Depend on it, Helen, you would have seen a bustling busy housewife; up to her eyes in pigs, poultry, and children, and without the faintest notion that her place of abode has anything singular about it, except in the matter of its being far from the township, and a bad road in winter."

Watching the girls as they rode, sometimes in front, sometimes at the side, according to the exigencies of the track, it occurred to me that I have never yet described them, even to myself. I may as well do so here.

Margaret is just eighteen. She is tall, and rather large; one of those women who, in middle life, develope into the best type of the fair and gracious English matron; her sunny face and laughing blue eyes are the light of our home; care and irritability fly before them; the face is one which will wear well. As time goes on, the mirth will change into kindliness; the laughing into a contented expression. It is rather a loveable than a *beautiful* face; but it grows on one, and with familiarity becomes more beautiful. Her temper is as sunny as her face. She is always cheerful; always looks on the bright side of things; always expects good, and finds good in people. She is not clever, but has sterling good sense; not far-sighted, but very observing; fond of amusement, and enjoying what pleasure comes in her way; but not much interested in events beyond the home circle. She is rather affectionate than philanthropic; want of imagination hinders in her an extended sympathy. She fails to realize suffering which she does not see.

In this she is different to Helen, who takes great interest in public affairs, and so intensely realizes the sorrows of others, that their shadow seems to fall on

herself. She is not winning at first sight, like Margaret; her pale, clear complexion and dark eyes harmonize well with the tall, slight figure, and dignified, almost cold bearing. She is affectionate, but not demonstrative. Strangers mistake her reserve for pride. Margaret, who has a friendly word for every one, once told her so in my hearing.

Helen's reply was characteristic. "How could I feel proud to strangers?" she exclaimed. "I never compare myself with any one but you or Fred. No one else touches *me*, the real *me*, except Janet, perhaps a little."

"That's it, Helen," said Margaret, "you regard people as outsiders. Your indifference is a species of pride."

"I don't think myself better than other people; in fact, most people are better than I am, Margaret. I feel proud to myself—my *true* self—do you understand?—I *mean* I must guard that, not let it get poor, or unworthy, or soiled; but I am not proud towards other people."

"That is self-respect," I said; "you are right to cherish that; but I agree with Margaret, that your indifference to those you call *outsiders* savours of pride, Helen."

"I always thought pride meant considering yourself better than other people," Helen repeated. "I am sure I don't do that."

"Perhaps if you did, you would appear more interested in strangers," said Margaret, "and show a little less indifference in your manner toward them."

"Oh, Margaret, I know now you are alluding to Mrs. Bence's visit. How could one get interested in that rigmarole about her grand relations at home, and her dead husband here? I assure you, Fred," she said, turning to

me, "Mrs. Bence jumbled up the conservatory which opened out of her drawing-room at Kensington, and her uncle the admiral, and her husband's death-bed, and a long illness she had herself, till I didn't know if it was the conservatory at home, or the hot winds here that occasioned 'dear William's' death; or, in fact, whether it was he, she, or the conservatory that was dead."

"Don't be satirical, Helen; her story was a little involved certainly; but one knew what she meant, and I could see it helped her to speak of her troubles. She has not often any one to talk to, and it was not much trouble to gratify her by appearing to be interested; indeed I was so sorry for her, that I got interested."

"Oh, Margaret, you are always kind!" cried Helen; "I am selfish, but not proud."

"No, dear," said Margaret, afraid she had hurt her sister, "not selfish, only too much *au serieuse*."

"A pertinacious little thing, who always sticks to her own side of a question—whether it be one of free selection or personal pride," I said, as they passed out of the room together.

Opposite as they are in temperament, they love each other dearly. I thought Helen's attempt at expressing her idea of pride very characteristic. Her nature is as yet undeveloped; it possesses great capabilities.

I have sometimes watched a worn, troubled face, in peaceful slumber; by degrees the wrinkles smooth out, the lines grow less marked, the tension of the lips relaxes, and the countenance suggests possibilities which are obscured in waking hours of care and struggle.

One gets a hint of the serene power and beautiful expression that nature might stamp on a more ethereal corporeity, and yet retain its personal identity. I have noticed the same thing in some photographs, which are

like, and yet not like; suggestive rather than exact. Helen is too young for her face to express much of this; but the rudiments are there. As yet she scarcely understands herself, and certainly makes little allowance for variety of disposition and the wearing friction of life in others. She has her ideal of excellence, and, like most young people of high aspirations, is not very tolerant of what falls below it. She has strong affections; at present they are lavished on Margaret and me; and none but those who live with her know how warmly she can love.

I often wonder what the future has in store for these my household flowers.

Margaret is like the magnificent rose queen, just opening her richly-coloured petals to the sun, and scenting the air with its loveliness. Helen is like the fair lily princess, her white leaves still folded, their clear shining and noble size giving promise of future splendour.

It is wonderful what an interest in life these girls have given me; I, who have stood aside so long, letting the stream flow past; my pipe and my dog being objects of chief importance. Finding companionship in these, I looked out on the world, wondered at the hubbub, and congratulated myself on my peaceful seclusion. I don't know that I have been so wise as I fancied; if I gained peace, I certainly missed happiness.

After all, I am not such a stoic as I supposed. Margaret twines herself round my heart, and Helen awakens a fostering tenderness, of which I had not thought myself capable.

I am an old man now; at least past middle age; but my spirits rise to the youthful element about me. I am pleased to share my sisters' pursuits, and find my happiness in promoting theirs.

The more I consider it, the more gratified I am that I summoned courage to decide on removal from Mial.

We shall begin life afresh in a new place. My sisters have certainly a right to a better home than this; it will not be a more loving one, but I hope more fitting and congenial for them.

Here, I have been too indifferent to care about extending my practice. I love my profession; but have not loved my fellow-creatures. Often, feeling disinclined to enlarge my circle of patients, I have sent applicants to other medical men. It has come now to be regarded as a favour for Doctor South to attend any but his old patients. The later population of Mial think me churlish,—and with reason.

Thus my own carelessness, together with the loss I sustained at the great flood, have made me poorer than I ought to be with the opportunities I have had; but I am still strong and active, and not behind in my profession. For this latter, indeed, I have to thank my first friend, Doctor Lay. On my departure from Melbourne, he said to me, "Be true to your profession, lad; wherever you are, remember you owe a duty to *it*; and, through it, to the world. Make yourself familiar with improved methods; so far as you can, test new discoveries; don't allow yourself to get behind the age. Make sure of keeping in communication with the centres of thought, by arranging for a regular supply of 'professional literature before you leave town."

I acted on his advice; and the interest thus created in my own surgery has saved me from seeking those outside excitements which so generally prove the ruin of the country practitioner in Australia.

How much good a word from a man at the top of his profession may do a young fellow at the bottom of it!

The girls have been talking about our journey; they wish to drive across the country to Lakeville.

"Our drive from Ballarat was the pleasantest part of our journey up," said Margaret; "the train rushes on, and one sees nothing."

"Besides," added Helen, "the train does not go all the way; we should have to join the coach, and tumble against all sorts of people."

I demurred, on account of the longer time driving ourselves would take. I am bound to be at Lakeville by the end of the year.

Janet, however, clenched the matter.

"Sure, sir, if the other doctor's to take the patients, it can't matter if he has them a week before, or a week after; the young leddies and you could start, leaving Andy and me to see to the things. Take yer holiday, ye' ll work the better afterwards. I'm sure the horses would rather draw you than be knocked about on the sea, poor things! I'll answer for them."

This last was a cogent argument.

The horses must go; so it is decided that we three drive, leaving Andy and Janet to follow with Nero, by public conveyance.

My third start in life! How will this one end? It is different from either of the others.

When I left England I was alone; but my heart was full of the one object, to win her on whom its first love was lavished. When I left Melbourne I was also alone; but my heart was empty, bare, objectless!

Now I go to Lakeville, my heart does not seem to be either full or empty, but simply occupied with fraternal, almost paternal affection. Life no longer appears to be made up of passion, but to contain many other things! Manly, kindly impulses,—above all duty, which stands forth as the one worthy aim!

At Teb-Teb and Mial I have gathered experience of myself, but I have failed to help others much. In

Melbourne others helped me. Now the ties of kindred call out a more healthy feeling.

Shall I be true to it? or will my natural indolence and self-absorption prevail? Who knows but the feeling may widen, and extend beyond the ties of kindred and of home?

CHAPTER XVI.

Our journey to Lakeville.—Are we lost?—"Jumbled-up" country.—An old friend.—New friends.—More blanks than prizes in matrimony.—A lawn party in the bush.—Colonial society.—Young Australia.

It is now several months since we arrived at Lakeville. After a long dry season, we have real winter weather. In this district I hear the early winter is often wet; after which we may expect dry, cold winds, before the very wet season which ushers in the spring.

To-day the wind is blowing all round the compass, shifting every few minutes; the rain falls afresh with each change of wind.

Margaret and Helen have been mysteriously invisible the greater part of the day, "doing up winter things,"—whatever that may mean; they have retired early, under pretence of being tired; but, *really*, I believe to carry on the interesting process. I observe that Janet is in and out of their room unusually often, and I hear her voice loud in admiration or remonstrance. A smell as of singed cloth pervades the house. Andy complains that he has no sooner made up his fire than it is disturbed again, to place some sort of iron on it.

I believe he is taking advantage of Janet's excitement to have a good grumble; he indulges in that luxury rather frequently of late, either because he can venture it without exciting so much notice as formerly, or because

he really is jealous of the large share the girls occupy of Janet's attention.

The wind rages, the rain beats, the unpaved streets are almost impassable. Mud and water predominate. The horses slip about fetlock deep in the rich chocolate soil, which presents such a contrast to the quartz and gravel at Mial. My work for the day is done, unless any unexpected call should arise. Nero and I are alone in the dining-room. "This big room is lonely, old fellow," I say, "let's take up our quarters in the den (as those saucy girls call it), and live the solitary life of old times for one night only."

Nero rises, blinks his eyes, and follows to my peculiar snuggery; here he solemnly lays his paw on my knee and looks into my face, inquiring whether the good old times are really coming back again.

"Goód times do you call them, my dog?" I say, "it seems lonely for us two by ourselves, listening to the far-off sound of merry laughter."

I've been wishing for a quiet time to record the incidents of our journey from Mial, and of our settling here; now that it has come, like other coveted gifts, it is not half valued.

Am I lazy? I like to think of our pleasant journey, it is the one grand holiday that I can remember since I grew to man's estate. I was too anxious on the voyage out to make that as much of a holiday as it might have been. My visit to Melbourne was divided between astonishment at the changes I saw, and doubt about the domestic changes impending. But our journey to Lakeville was a real holiday. We had nearly a fortnight before us, we left no care behind us; the future looked pleasant, we enjoyed each other's society, and the horses appeared to enjoy ours, for they went forward in excellent spirits. Even misadventures amused us. New scenes, new people,

new places. Let me try to recall it all. How long it seems since we left Mial; time always appears long when there has been much change or many unaccustomed events.

We left Mial very early in the morning, in order to get a good rest during the heat of the day. Before we came to our proposed stopping-place we had turned our backs on mountain ranges, and bidden adieu to the gold regions. Still it was not until the morning of the third day that we were altogether in a new country, and I found it necessary, before making a start, to inquire a little concerning the road; I knew the direction in which we should travel, but was not sure of the best route.

Being told to look out for two slightly diverging tracks on a rising ground, just visible in the distance, and to take the left-hand one, we started confidently.

The country before us was one vast expanse of plain, stretching as far as the eye could reach; a tree-top here and there, or a low hill, dimly visible. Following the bush track (for we had now done with roads), we soon came to the fence which had been mentioned as close to the diverging path; however, we looked in vain, for only a small cattle track was to be seen, and it was on our right.

Our informant had certainly said *left*, so we avoided the right-hand cattle track, and drove forward, satisfied that we were on the left-hand road and following the direction given.

After a time, however, I perceived by the bearings of the sun that we were going more to the east than I had expected. I told the girls I was beginning to doubt whether we should not have followed the right-hand cattle track. They however both declared that we had been told to "be sure and take the left hand;" so we went on a little farther.

Presently I pulled up to consider the matter; we had

proceeded several miles, and the road still bore to the east.

To turn back was disheartening; to attempt to cross the plains in search of a westerly track was hazardous, and as Margaret sagely observed, "the road we were on must lead somewhere;" we therefore decided on continuing it, hoping the "somewhere" was not very far off.

I took out the horses by a small water-hole and gave them a feed, getting our own lunch at the same time. So fortified, we proceeded onward; but the day wore on and our patience wore out; it became evident that we had lost our way.

The same interminable plains stretched all round, except to the left, where distant hills and forests broke the monotony.

Not a human being, not a sign of habitation, neither lowing of cattle nor song of bird to break the stillness.

The sun began to decline; I was getting seriously uneasy, when we got sight of a few trees in front. Still it was only a slight variety of the same scene; the "somewhere" of which Margaret was assured appeared as distant as ever.

In a moment the view changed as if by magic; the road came suddenly to the top of a steep, almost precipitous descent, and "somewhere" lay before us in the form of a pretty village with a river winding through it.

From the spot on which we stood the road turned abruptly to the right; the face of the hill being cut away to admit of its formation. The river ran close to the foot of the hill, the village being built on the opposite side, and approached by a bridge, which crossed the stream at the bottom of the descent. We found comfortable quarters for the night at the picturesque little inn; but I confess I was vexed at hearing that the right-hand cattle track was the one I should have followed. Whether it was the

man who directed us or we ourselves that had made the mistake we never knew; however, we consoled ourselves for our lost day by the remembrance of having seen the very remarkable view presented by Leishburn as it opens suddenly at the feet of the traveller approaching from the westward.

On the following morning we made an early start, being really farther from our destination than we had been on the previous day.

We had to retrace our steps up the steep hill, and then bear away in a southerly direction.

The girls and I walked up the ascent to relieve the horses, and to observe its peculiarity more at our ease. Arrived at the top, we struck away across the plains towards a town which I knew to be on the Geelong road; it was not our nearest route, but I felt it would be better to get on to a main road. We passed a lake on the south, apparently about twenty miles in length, of irregular shape, in some places not more than a mile or two in breadth; but at the north end nearly five miles wide. Another lake, on its western extremity, is separated from it by a narrow neck of land, about a quarter of a mile in width—a gigantic natural causeway.

We made our proposed stage by noon, and stayed to rest during the heat of the day. The moon was about full; the road is good; horses go better after sunset. I felt we could afford them a long spell, and yet make Reptown that night.

For some time after we had again started the lake was in sight, glittering in the sunlight; its waters look clear and bright, but I believe they are brackish, like most of the other lakes here. About twenty miles from Reptown we came on to a most peculiar piece of country, a narrow strip, evidently of volcanic formation, extending about five miles from east to west, considerably more

from north to south. The character of this bit of country is almost indescribable, and quite different from anything I have seen elsewhere.

A series of irregular hills, ranging perhaps from forty to one hundred feet in height, packed together so closely that the spaces between seem as if they were being crowded out, and, in some cases, are reduced to a mere inverted cone. Hills and valleys are alike covered with rough lava-like stones of all shapes and sizes.

Through this "jumbled up" country—(I really do not know any expression properly descriptive of it)—there is a macadamized road running in a very tortuous direction—now round the side of one hill, then over the crest of a little knoll, across a hollow by means of an embankment, here skirting another hill in a different direction, there, in some places, boldly thrown over a deep hollow by a short viaduct, ever giving a change of view, but always one of wild beauty. The impression which the whole scene left on my mind was that of a tempestuous sea, suddenly solidified; the tossing waves changed into hills, their crested tops into the stony spray which lay thickly scattered around.

It was late when we reached Reptown. We were thoroughly weary, and glad to get to bed.

Next morning, very early, I was roused by a great deal of shouting and hurrahing. On looking from my window I saw a big coach, drawn by four horses, with the conspicuous "Cobb and Co." painted in red at the back. Around it was a party of boys of ages varying from twelve to sixteen, seizing their bags, searching for overcoats, and making a general disturbance.

"I say, has father come?" shouted one of them to the groom in the stable-yard, who was attending to the tired horses.

As he spoke, a burly figure emerged from the hotel. The boy rushed towards him, and the "Well, my lad," "How are you, father?" had an English ring that reminded me of my own school days. The other boys came towards the gentleman, who held the smallest of the group by the arm.

They talked vociferously and all at once, lingering about the door, watching the putting-to of fresh horses.

Presently the driver came out, stout and red-faced: he appeared on excellent terms with the boys, who cheered lustily as the coach drove off, and then accompanied the gentleman into the hotel.

Now was heard a great rush of feet and banging of doors, amid which I emerged from my chamber and descended to the public room. Here I found the waiter and a maid-servant clearing away the remains of the breakfast served for the coach travellers, and preparing another.

"My word, we're hungry!" exclaimed one of the new arrivals, entering the room.

"Look sharp, Jane, or I shall take a bite at you!" cried another.

"Ham and eggs," said a third, "no end of eggs, mind; we don't get eggs in town."

The gentleman who had met them interposed.

"Be quiet, lads; you'll bamboozle Jane, and have to wait the longer."

His voice was familiar to me; I looked into his face, it reminded me of some person or place I had seen long ago.

"A holiday party," I observed, seeing he also was examining me.

"I—I beg your pardon," said the stranger, with a puzzled expression, such a perfect reflection of my own feeling that I could not help laughing.

"Ah, now, I'm sure!" he cried, "don't you recollect me, South?"

The hearty voice and warm grasp refreshed my memory; I recognized William Elton, my special friend and companion during my voyage to Australia.

At first we had corresponded, he having gone to some friends on the Sydney side; but after my trouble I wrote to no one, and we had lost sight of each other for many years.

This unexpected meeting was a mutual pleasure; for a few minutes I think we were as much excited and had as much to say as the boys. Elton told me he and his younger brother (who had joined him in Victoria some years previously) had been connected with this district a long while. Originally they had stations near Lakeville, and Edward still had a small property there, but had lately taken up a large station across the border, where he spent half the year.

"Ted is down earlier than usual, this year," said Elton, "and I am glad that you should know him; he's a finer fellow than ever I was; beats me to pieces at business, and everything else."

"Tell me about yourself," I said; "do you mean to say we're so lucky as to be going to live in your neighbourhood?" for I had told him I was going to take the practice at Lakeville.

"Not exactly, though we're often down with Ted at his old place when he's at home; in fact we're partners there; but my own place is at Graslands. I came over to meet the boys coming home for the Christmas holidays. Of course you'll go back with us: Mrs. Elton would never forgive me; she has heard so much about you."

Margaret and Helen had joined us; by this time we were all seated at breakfast. Elton had proudly intro-

duced his two boys, who, with their companions, were very busy satisfying their hunger.

I hesitated about going so far out of our direct course as Graslands would be; but Elton would not hear of postponing our visit. Our inclinations went with his wishes, and we decided to change our proposed route, and go by Graslands. The girls would get a long rest, and so would the horses, and I should renew a friendship I had always valued, and become acquainted with my friend's wife.

"It's the most natural thing in the world," said Elton; "in fact, Miss South, it's the *only* thing that could possibly be done. What did I meet you for, but that we may all be chums again?"

"I thought you met the boys," said Margaret, laughing; "but I'm sure Helen and I shall like to go; and to be *chums* will be delightful."

Elton and I left the room to see to the horses, attended by the boys; Margaret and Helen went to prepare for the fresh start, which was to be made at once, as Mrs. Elton expected the party from town that evening.

The fertility of the district through which we drove, in Elton's wake, took me by surprise. Instead of untrodden forest or upturned gravel, we now saw large cleared paddocks, well stocked with sheep or cattle, whose fine condition testified to the luxuriance of the feed.

In some places the land was in crop, and wherever the plough had been at work the richness of the soil and abundant yield proved that farming might be extensively carried on in this district if its distance from a market did not hinder.

The township, about a mile from Elton's Station, is situated in the midst of a plain, having a picturesque mount at one end, and a lake almost covered with tea-tree

scrub at the other. The mount is one of the chain of extinct volcanoes which are to be seen at intervals, extending quite down to the ocean. All have craters more or less distinctly marked; the one at Graslands is broken away on one side, not therefore so plainly to be traced as many of like character.

The station is near this hill. The trees are few, and seem to be collected together on a knoll at the back of the house. As we approached, Harry (Elton's eldest boy) indulged in a coo—e—ey loud and long. Before the sound had died away a number of younger children appeared on the verandah, and rushed towards the gate which Harry had got down to open and now left for the others to close, little William having got out also. The two were presently to be seen crowding round their mother and tumbling about among the little ones.

Helen whispered to me that she thought we ought not to have come; Mrs. Elton would like to be alone with her boys after not having seen them for six months.

We were passing through the gates. Elton had alighted, and held them open for us.

"Look here, my dear fellow," said I; "this isn't fair to Mrs. Elton, invading her like this—just now too; let's go to the hotel for to-night, and we'll spend to-morrow with you."

A young man on horseback rode up as I spoke. He looked a little surprised, and grasped the crown of his soft hat hurriedly when he perceived ladies among the party.

Elton introduced his brother, who seemed to know all about me at once.

"Come on, Edward," cried our host, "and corroborate my statement that there is a smoking-room at the back which the boys do not invade. Here's South horrified at this specimen of Bedlam let loose."

"Oh, it's not that," Margaret said, "but we are thinking of Mrs. Elton, and her boys who have been away from home so long."

"This is Harry's eighth vacation, Miss South," said young Elton, walking by the side of our buggy. "My sister knows she will have his company, and that of his companions, at meals, that she will hear them from daylight till dark, and catch glimpses of them and their ponies flying across the country with half a dozen dogs at their heels, that they will usually appear about dinner-time, with clothes torn and dusty faces, bruised and scratched, and that the result of their visit will be—ponies reduced to skin and bones, station boys and dogs utterly unruly, and the household generally demoralized. You laugh, but I assure you these are our experiences of the boys' home-coming. Mrs. Elton and the village generally take measures accordingly. She abandons certain portions of the house to the invaders, hires a couple of extra hands in the laundry, and lays in a stock of patience. The township prepares to be kept in a chronic state of excitement in reference to the fate of little children and stray poultry who may inadvertently get under the feet of the ponies as they come helter-skelter down from the Mount."

"A tempting description of Christmas fun," said Margaret, as the young man assisted her and Helen from the buggy and walked with them towards Mr. and Mrs. Elton, who were come to meet us.

"I have been trying to arouse Miss South's curiosity concerning our holiday doings," said he, addressing Mrs. Elton.

She came forward with both hands stretched out, heartily welcoming the girls, then turned immediately to me,—

"I am so glad to meet you at last, Doctor South.

William's journal during the voyage was full of allusions to you. We have often wondered what had become of you."

I recollected now that Elton was engaged to an English lady, and used to talk to me about her as we paced the deck at night, and that I too had made a like confidence to him concerning Caroline. It was so long ago that I had forgotten it until Mrs. Elton's allusion to the ship journal brought it to mind. I determined to take an opportunity of requesting him to forget that episode of my early years.

Mrs. Elton carried my sisters off to the house, and I accompanied my friend to the stables, the boys having taken possession of "Uncle Ted," who seemed as much of a boy as any of them.

I had been pleased to notice their gentlemanly manner to Mrs. Elton and her daughter, excited as they were. Her young visitors showed true delicacy of feeling in keeping behind while she met her sons and husband. Not until she had welcomed my party did they come up, cap in hand, to greet her.

Before I returned with Elton to the house I had mentioned my wish that he would make no allusion to my former attachment. I suppose he saw it was a painful subject, for he forbore to question me or to make any remark, only that evening in the smoking-room he said,—

"I thought, South, you were just the fellow to have married. I should have made a warm bet that way if any one had questioned me about it."

"Perhaps it's as well as it is; there are more blanks than prizes in matrimony," I remarked.

"Nonsense, man! you'll marry yet," he replied.

"*I* marry! Though I'm an old man, Elton, I'm not quite in my dotage. Let's change the subject." And we began to talk of Lakeville.

"Ted liked that neighbourhood," said Elton; "and he's

uncommonly popular down there still. A few years ago the run was a capital one, and I thought we should have been able to purchase, but the free selectors came down like bees, pegging out the best pieces of the unpurchased ground, and Ted got disgusted, and went north to take up new country. The homestead remains and a few hundred acres of selected land, but the best of the run is gone. Several of the station hands, even the overseer, who had married Ted's housekeeper, pegged out the fattening paddock. Both he and his wife worked hard; now they've actually managed to build a much better house there than Ted's old one, and the greater part of the run has fallen into their hands."

"It does seem hard to the squatters," I replied. "And yet I suppose industrious, steady men ought to have a chance."

"I don't grudge it to that sort," cried Ted, who had joined us. "It's the sham selectors, who've neither industry nor savings to go upon, that rile me. They're an injury to the country. However, they haven't reached the Guinnam, so I'm satisfied."

"Is that your river?" I asked. "I hear there's fine country there, and any amount of it."

"Yes, I've a couple of runs—a large sheep station on the lower Guinnam, and a small cattle run on the upper."

"Ted's got more push in him than I ever had," Elton remarked. "I'm grown lazy too now and easy-going."

"You seem to have got a nice place here though," I said.

"Yes, we took it up in the good days, before land acts were invented. My wife's money helped the purchase. It's small, but it's a home to start the children from."

Next morning we all rode out to some springs in the neighbourhood, and, returning over the hill, dismounted

to examine the crater. The girls were disappointed at finding it imperfect and quite dry.

"You'll have three splendid specimens close to you at Lakeville," said Edward. "Miss South, I bespeak the honour of being the first to introduce you to Lakeville Island. Promise you'll let me take you down the big crater."

"Go down a crater!" cried Margaret. "Is that practicable?"

"Oh, yes! I've been down to the water's edge many times. There are splendid cherry and musk trees, and some pretty creepers."

"I'm sure we shall like to go very much," said Margaret.

"Then it's a bargain; I'm to take you. Doctor, will you witness the compact?"

"If it's to include me," I said.

"Oh, of course; you and Miss Helen. I only don't want any of the Lakeville people to do the honours; they don't know the best points of view."

We were surprised that afternoon to see what a pleasant company could be gathered on such short notice in that thinly populated neighbourhood.

With their English ideas and limited colonial experience Margaret and Helen had rather pooh-poohed the notion of a lawn party.

"You know," said Helen, a little superciliously, "it could not amuse us to meet these local people, and it would only give Mrs. Elton trouble."

Margaret was rather for seeing the "local people," and was pleased to hear that during our absence that morning Mrs. Elton had sent out a few unceremonious invitations.

Most of the bidden guests managed to come, and the scene on the lawn that afternoon was graceful and pleasant. The lawn was dotted with fine trees: seats had

been placed under them, which overlooked the croquet-ground; that was beautifully level and smooth, the white hoops contrasting with the rich green of the turf, always kept well watered.

Clumps of laurel and some bushy acacias grew on one side. Under their shade were lounging-chairs and low stools. The ladies moved about, their thin dresses and bright ribbons floating in the breeze. Gentlemen in light coats and white hats wielded the mallets and anxiously consulted their fair partners as to the advisability of certain strokes.

Our hostess and some elderly ladies sat under the trees watching the players, crossing the lawn now and then to inspect the progress of the game, or to go outside to the cricket-ground, when sounds more than usually boisterous came thence.

From the verandah we could see the boys in their shirt-sleeves, bowling and batting with a degree of skill and energy which would not have disgraced an English cricket-field. As the afternoon wore on a servant came from the house with refreshments. The table stood under the trees, covered with glass and silver glittering in the slanting sunlight: the fruit looked more luscious, and the cream of a richer hue; the coffee was finer, and the cool drinks more refreshing than any we get indoors.

Gentlemen surrounded the table, procuring refreshments for the ladies, who were grouped about the lawn. The boys at a long table under the verandah, did full justice to a more substantial meal.

I observed Margaret, the centre of a merry group, laughingly disputing some proposition of Edward Elton's. Helen sat near, amused and interested.

Altogether it was a scene of refined social pleasure, such as I had not beheld for many a long year.

"Well, Helen, what do you think of our 'local people?" I asked, going up to her.

"Oh, Fred, I shall never hear the last of that unlucky speech! I didn't mean to be disparaging, only that we were well amused by ourselves. I don't suppose England means to be disparaging to Australia; but I fancy that phrase 'local people' pretty much expresses the English notion of colonial society; and yet this is a scene that would not discredit the most exclusive of county circles at home. No indeed, I confess I am surprised; somehow I got the idea that colonial society was loud and vulgar."

"Not in the best circles; mind I don't say the wealthiest, or most fashionable; and much less so in the country than in Melbourne."

Our host passed us at that moment, attending two ladies to their carriage, and Mrs. Elton came up to the house with some of her younger guests.

"I have persuaded Mrs. —— to leave her daughters for the night, so we shall have some dancing," she said.

That evening I heard my sister's playing for the first time. Margaret had confided to me in the morning that she longed to touch the piano once more, but did not like to make her first trial among strangers; however, in the evening she was easily persuaded to take her turn at playing for the dancers.

We had singing too, and Maggie sung some simple ballads in her own charming, unaffected manner.

Edward sang with her in one; he has a fine voice, and their duet created quite an enthusiasm.

Helen did not sing; her earnest "Please don't ask me, I *could* not," silenced entreaties.

I heard Margaret whisper to Mrs. Elton not to press her. "Helen has not sung," she said, "since mamma's death. I sing about the house, almost without knowing

it, but Helen's singing is not like mine ; it reminds you of a soul singing, every note touches your heart; our master said when she grew older her voice would be magnificent."

"I hope," replied Mrs. Elton, "we shall often hear you both." I made up my mind they should have an instrument, at any rate.

The next morning we took leave of our friends, and only, as we all hoped, for a short time; Lakeville being not more than forty miles from Grastown, and Edward's remaining ownership in the Wells station occasioning pretty frequent intercourse between the two places. He indeed, had business there at this time, and proposed riding over with us; but there was such an outcry among the boys, and Mrs. Elton herself looked so much disappointed at the idea of his leaving them so soon, that he gave it up, and it was arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Elton should accompany Edward to the Wells so soon as the boys' holidays were over.

"How nice it is that we met Mr. Elton!" cried Margaret, when we were fairly on the road again; "besides enjoying ourselves here, it makes us feel less like strangers going to a new place."

"Yes," replied Helen, "a visit to such people is a thing to remember; their simple friendliness and refined ease gives one quite a home feeling."

"I am glad you were so gratified," I said; "it is a great pleasure to me to renew my acquaintance with Elton, who is a thorough good fellow; when I was watching the arrival of those boys at Reptown, I little thought whom they belonged to."

"It was an odd coincidence that brought you both there at the same time. And those boys," laughed Margaret, "it was fun to see them 'tattered and torn,' but not at all 'forlorn,' when the gong sounded, making a

rush to their rooms, to get themselves decent for table; there was a good deal of gentlemanly feeling, in spite of their wildness."

"Yes," said Helen, "if that is a fair specimen of young Australia, the country has a hopeful future."

CHAPTER XVII.

An Australian village.—An Australian landscape.

THE road for some miles after leaving Grastown was made, and we got on quickly to a ford, the bridge across which had been washed away by a high flood the previous spring, and was in process of rebuilding.

The water was shallow enough at this season; we had no difficulty in crossing. By and by we found ourselves on a pretty bush track, tolerably level, and well timbered. About noon we reached a small inn, apparently set up in the middle of the forest; one wondered how it was supported; afterwards we discovered that, like many others of its class, it was half farm, and half inn; there were also more neighbours than a passer-by would suppose, chiefly selectors and splitters.

We lunched here on bacon and eggs, with excellent potatoes. It was plain that we had entered a district in which the Irish element predominated, and consequently that the soil was good, for few Irishmen settle where the "spuds" won't flourish.

The deep rich green of the potatoe fields brightened the landscape; droves of pigs about the cottages added life, if not brilliancy, to the scene. We passed a station noted for its breed of first-class horses, and soon after arrived at an English-looking village, the sort of place one can't call a township. A cluster of neat cottages, with verandahs, showing some splendid flowers in pot, and surrounded by

fine gardens; a steep descent to a clear, broad river flowing between overhanging woods on the one side and the village on the other. This river is spanned by a good bridge. On a hill beyond it two churches stand out prominently, one a plain, square stone building, the other a pretty wooden church embosomed in trees.

A large mill, low down by the river, behind the church, was noisily at work. A blacksmith's forge threw out showers of sparks. Cows came lowing homewards; geese cackled; children's voices sounded from the streets; altogether it was just a picture of a prosperous English village.

We were comfortably lodged that night, and set forward next day in good time, hoping to reach our destination early in the afternoon.

We bowled along a well-kept road, farms on either side generally with large paddocks cleared and cultivated. Haymaking was going on in several, the sweet scent filled the air. In others barley was cut, and standing in shocks, ready to be ricked. In a few the full ears of corn bent low with their golden treasure, but potatoes were still the main feature; close by, and in the distance, the bright potatoe patch was a prominent object.

Descending a short, steep hill, we looked on a large tract of pasture-land with the river running through it. Thousands of sheep dotted the grassy expanse. Woolsheds, men's huts, and outbuildings, gathered about the house reminded us of feudal days, when the baron dwelt in the midst of his retainers; only instead of a moat and drawbridge, was the full, broad stream, and a cushioned boat moored under the trees which formed an avenue along its banks.

A large rambling house, with casement windows, took the place of turret and tower. Scarlet verbena and other creepers trained along the front did duty for buttress and

scutcheon. A lovely garden, with a number of tree ferns among the flowers and shrubs, was a decided improvement on the castle courtyard. Some ladies, with books and work, sitting on the verandah, represented the chatelaines of old.

Amusing ourselves with these fancies, we slowly mounted a steep, long hill on the opposite side.

As we approached the top the road cleared, and the girls exclaimed simultaneously,—

"The sea, the sea! Oh, Fred, do stop!"

We turned and had a good look, sniffing the briny air with delight; still leisurely climbing the hill, our eyes were beguiled in a backward direction by the glimpse of sea on our left.

Suddenly I pulled up, astonished at the view which burst on us from the top of the hill. The girls looked round, and, for a moment, we were all mute.

There was indeed the mighty ocean reflecting from its blue depths the measureless blue above; there, too, were the vast hummocks of sand which stayed its restless waves; while, far away in the distance, the rocky cliffs stretched on to Cape Otway.

The near view was rich in agricultural beauty; corn-fields glowing in the sun, verdant pastures dotted with cattle and horses. Immediately in front, the hill descended with precipitous abruptness, a depth of 300 feet at least; its sides clothed with the unvarying gum-tree, relieved here by the dark foliage of the blackwood and feathery grace of the wattle. At the base of the hill was a large lake, its water gleaming in the sun; on the near side shallow, and tufted in many places with flags and reeds; on the farther side clear, and gently ruffled by the breeze. The road wound along the ridge of the hills which swept round on either side, encircling the lake, maintaining the same height and the same abrupt

wooded descent to the water for some distance on the right hand. On the left they gradually decreased in height and steepness till, beginning to round again on the opposite side, they fell off suddenly to within a few feet of the water level, rising again as suddenly to meet the height of the northern shore.

The irregular outline of a large island, with sugar-loaf peaks, occupied a considerable portion of the lake. Three small islets surrounded it at varying distances. The principal island consisted of a cluster of hills, rising abruptly from the lake, each apparently contending with its neighbour for precedence in elevation. All, however, gave way to one comparatively giant peak, a little south of the centre, whose cone-like summit was on a level with the highest point of the hill-side.

These islands were covered with a dense scrub of ferns and undergrowth, from out of which (on the larger one) forest trees grew thickly in some places, in others leaving the side bare and precipitous.

The one drawback to this wilderness of beauty was that many of the trees on the south side were dead, and stretched their naked arms in skeleton gauntness over the dense scrub at their feet, giving to the scene a weird and peculiar aspect, which we felt somehow was in harmony with the magic suddenness with which it had first burst on our sight.

After gazing for some time on this, which of its kind is one of the loveliest views in Australia, we turned our horses' heads to the right, and drove slowly round the ridge of the hill, till we reached a road turning sharply from the lake, from whence we looked down on the township which was to be our future home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A visit to the craters.—The hill of fire.—Envious genii.—Edward Elton.—A bush giant-killer.—Pat at home.—The land gets no rest.—Ecclesiastical matters.—A colonial parish.—Black police and coloured police.

I HAVE been very busy since we arrived at Lakeville, getting into harness in my new practice, and making acquaintance with the people and district.

Familiar as I have now grown with this gem of southern scenery, it has lost none of its charm. Returning from a long ride, I frequently linger on the top of the hill, to watch its varying aspects under different effects of light and shade. The girls never weary of this walk; on a cool day in summer they will go down the steep cattle-track leading to the lake, and gather cress, which grows abundantly by some springs half way down the hill-side, or accompany Andy on an expedition in search of tree ferns, wherewith he is ambitious of embellishing our small garden, in emulation of the larger one on a neighbouring station. Helen is making a collection of the varieties of fern found on the hill-side, and has already obtained a number of different specimens. Fine cherry-trees flourish in the recesses of the hill; mimosa and native box scent the air; indigifra, sheep vine, purple heath, and yellow tansy add colouring; the lake ripples sluggishly hundreds of wild fowl whirr and dip among the rushes; now and then a stately black swan glides gracefully on to the

open water, over which a group of shea-oaks, from a point on the island, wave their funereal plumes.

There is a small space on the hill-side kept comparatively clear by some fallen timber. On still days Margaret and Helen betake themselves thither, and have established a mia-mia of their own there. The trunk of one of the trees serves for a seat, a large stump for table, on which to place books or drawing materials. Helen reads aloud while Margaret sketches. Nero (who has developed an æsthetic taste of late) accompanies them, and sits upright on his tail, critically surveying the scene, creating a diversion occasionally by chasing a few of the kangaroo who yet linger on the hill-side.

It was not long before Edward Elton fulfilled his promise and introduced us to the islands. Since then we have made several excursions, landing on all of them. I find the largest to be about five miles round and two across. It is a series of volcanic peaks, with valleys between, thickly strewn with lava. Near the highest point is a large crater, its bottom covered with water, its precipitous sides with cherry and young shea-oaks; lovely creepers hide among the undergrowth of ferns. On the farthest point of this island is a narrow ridge. A steep precipice on each side of it runs into a gorge two hundred feet below.

Standing on this ridge, two other craters are in sight; one large, wild-looking, with great boulders and rocks in every imaginable position; the other in a valley, surrounded by soft ferns and yellow mimosa; its clear waters free from the duck-weed which floats on the top of the other two.

When Edward Elton took us to the ridge I could not believe that this baby crater (as he calls it) was not an inlet from the lake. On closer examination, however, I found it really was a third crater.

There are some lovely secluded bays round this island formed by points of land stretching out into the lake, the foliage in which is very luxuriant; natural bowers of wattle, blackwood, and tall ferns, with some fine specimens of the *Cassia Spectabilis*, the top of which, when in flower, measures five yards round. A few kangaroo remain on the island, plenty of opossums, and bandicoots.

The other islands are small, almost impassable from the tangled undergrowth of ferns and young trees. The older trees are dead. From a distance they give a strangely unnatural aspect to the scene.

The northern portion of the lake itself is shallow, barely covering its submerged trees, the forks of which may be seen very near the surface of the water. Navigation in this part is not easy.

The house most frequented by Margaret and Helen is the parsonage. The clergyman is a very old friend of the Eltons. He has a daughter to whom my sisters have taken immensely, though she is much older than they are.

I remember, one warm afternoon, Edward persuaded Miss Carr and her father to take a row on the lake with Margaret and Helen, he acting as boatman. I was not able to accompany them, having a professional engagement, but when I came home at eight o'clock I found them still absent, and was becoming rather anxious when they appeared. The boat had got forked on the branches of a submerged tree. They had great difficulty in getting clear. By the time they had succeeded it had grown too dark to steer through the rushes on our side of the lake; they were obliged, therefore, to row out into the open where the water is deep, land on the opposite side, and, leaving the boat there, to walk home.

The volcanic disturbance, of which the whole district bears trace, seems to have found final vent here. The lake itself is doubtless a large crater, of which the side

towards the sea has worn away, leaving a narrow outlet to the ocean, the islands being thrown up by an expiring effort of the subterranean force.

A shower of volcanic rocks lies on the sea-shore, about two miles south of the outlet, apparently the last remains of the fiery deluge, which must have inundated the country in comparatively modern days, judging from the growth and size of the oldest trees. Digging into the hill-side one comes on large heaps of cinders. Sinking for a well lately, we found burnt ferns and cinders at a depth of about seventy feet. The native name for the place signifies Hill of Fire, but it is a common one among them for many other parts of the country of similar volcanic character. The tribe has no tradition on the subject.

Soon after Edward came to the Wells Station, Mr. and Mrs. Elton paid us a visit of some weeks. When they left us to join Edward, Margaret and Helen accompanied them, and remained a few days at the station.

Very lonely the house was without them. Janet felt it almost as much as I did.

I wandered about of an evening restless and unable to settle to my work. The night after their departure, strolling into the garden, I found Andy watering some fuchsias.

"I thought you did not approve of watering, Andy," said I.

"'Deed, no, sir, unless there's plenty of water, and ye can make sure of it through the dry season, which isn't the case here."

"But you *are* watering, though."

"'Tis Miss Helen's plants. 'You know, Andy,' says she, 'the puir bit things is used to it; they're like petted children; if you neglect them, they'll droop directly.' 'So,' says I, 'Miss Helen, it's agin my principles, but I'll do it for you.'"

Janet came towards us.

"Ye look lost, sir, and so does my Jock for the matter of that; however *did* we do before the leddies came?"

"I reckon we'll have to do again yet, when they're gone—please God we live," said Andy significantly.

It was the first time the idea of my sisters' leaving me had occurred to my mind. I walked away to consider the suggestion; it was not agreeable, and (as I saw no reason for entertaining it then) I put it away from me; but I have not been altogether able to forget it.

It recurred to me one afternoon when Edward came in rather excited, and petitioned very earnestly that we would come with him to the lake.

When we reached the water, he hurried Margaret round the point; presently we heard an exclamation of surprise.

Helen and I, turning into the little bay, found Margaret examining a newly-painted boat, fitted with crimson cushions and bright blue oars.

Elton was urging her to step on board.

"Do indulge me!" I heard him say. She allowed him to assist her over the side, turning to us and exclaiming, "Is it not delightful, Helen? How we have wished to go on to the open! Mr. Elton says he will teach us to row."

"Not here," said I grimly; "these sunken trees and rushes are no place for you to row in."

"No," said Edward, "we will go fairly out, and then I hope you will give me permission to show the ladies how to handle the oar."

"Oh, Fred, it is called the 'Lady Margaret'!" cried Helen, greatly pleased. "How nice of you, Mr. Elton! you heard us wishing for a boat, and here it is. Are you a good fairy?"

"Are fairies able to give gifts to themselves as well as to other people, Miss Helen?"

"Oh, yes, the good people are good to themselves, I fancy," she replied.

"Then I wish I was a fairy, Miss Helen," Elton said. He spoke to Helen, but he looked at Margaret. She was leaning over the side, dipping her hands in the water, with an air of dreamy enjoyment.

"Come here, Helen!" she cried; "do you remember how we used to look into the depths of the clear tropical sea, and watch the bright weeds floating under the water?"

"And wonder about mermaids and water babies," added Helen, stooping over the boat; "how strange these dry white branches look, with their skeleton arms stretched out, as if to seize and draw us down. Are they fossilized Kraken, or transformed genii, envying our pleasure in fresh air and sunlight?"

"Don't be fanciful Helen," said I, rather crossly I am afraid, for Elton had been urging me to row out a little way; I felt disinclined to the proposal, and out of sorts. I thought it would be better to get the girls home, and pleaded an engagement.

Helen's allusion to envious genii made me uncomfortable.

Was *I* envious? Because my own youth was gone, did I grudge its pleasures to others? *I* had been stricken with age in my first youth; what good had my life done me, or indeed any one else?

I suppose my gloomy thoughts were reflected in my face.

"What is the matter, Fred?" asked Helen. "Are you worried at our delay?"

"Let us return at once," cried Margaret, rising; "Mr. Elton, this is very kind of you! I hope when Fred has time, we shall all be able to enjoy the boat."

Margaret spoke with a gracious dignity which became

her well; she looked graver than usual, as she laid her hand on my arm, and her touch recalled my thoughts to the present.

"Stay," said I, looking at my watch, "if I am at home by five o'clock, it will do; can we make the open and back in an hour, do you think, Elton?"

"Easily," cried the young man, the cloud clearing from his brow as he stood up, and began to steer through the rushes with one oar. "Hurrah, then, for the 'Lady Margaret!' Here goes."

I took the other oar, and we went from side to side, sticking our oars among the submerged trees, and sometimes knocking off a branch.

I had not handled an oar for years; but the want of practice was not much felt, there being no current. I soon entered heartily into the general enjoyment; I am afraid my engagement was forgotten. There never was a merrier party; when we were clear of the shallow water, I showed Margaret how to row, Elton instructing Helen.

We landed on the island, and gathered some of the mimosa and scented box, returning home about dark.

Elton remained late, riding back to the Wells by moonlight. The cloud which had come among us in the afternoon dispersed. It had been a shadow from the future; with one consent we stepped out of it into the cheerful present. I will not say that it did not show itself to me after Edward was gone and the girls had retired; but I put it from me *then* and *since*—maybe it is only a fancy of mine.

Young Elton has become intimate with both my sisters; but is less marked in his attentions to Margaret than he was at first.

She is thoughtful and more tender to us all than ever.

Edward Elton is certainly a fine fellow. I liked him

from the beginning of our acquaintance; now that I know him as a friend, I thoroughly appreciate his manly sentiments and high sense of honour.

There is one thing about him which I have never been brought closely into contact with before, and which I do not quite understand. It is his simple religious faith. He never parades it. He never ignores it. It seems simply a part of himself, and it shows itself in his every action. Our Mechanics' Institute and Library are, I hear, mainly his work.

When he had the Upper Wells Station, he set himself to improve the condition of the young men in Lakeville, which, like so many other country places in the colony, offered no place of amusement or relaxation but the public-house, with its billiard-table and gambling facilities.

Elton established first a coffee and reading-room, which was well supplied with papers and periodicals of an entertaining as well as useful class. He took personal trouble to get amusing games, good engravings, &c., and was himself present frequently. The room was always well lighted, comfortably arranged, and open *free*. Good coffee was provided at a small charge. Everything was done to make the place attractive, and give it an air of home comfort.

The better class of neighbours began to take an interest in it; lectures and public readings were inaugurated, a piano purchased, and concerts given.

Very soon a subscription list was opened, and the present Institute and Library built.

Mr. Carr, the clergyman of Lakeville, told me this origin of the Mechanics' Institute one day when I happened to meet him just outside. "The good that was done in that old coffee-room," said he, "no human being can estimate; and all so naturally and quietly that people

in general scarcely knew what was going on, until the happy results began to attract notice."

Edward still takes great interest in the Institute, as well as in Lakeville generally, and has much influence in the place.

"May I get lunch with you?" asked he one Sunday, as I met him riding into the township by the side of Mrs. Elton's carriage.

"Certainly; I shall be at home then," I replied, going up to pay my respects to Mrs. Elton.

"Ted generally spends his Sundays in the township when he is down," she explained.

He returned from church with the girls, who, to my surprise, announced that Mr. Elton was going to the sunday school in the afternoon.

"Sunday-school! is there a Sunday-school here?" I asked.

"Of course there is, Fred," Helen replied, "though we never thought about it."

"I don't know why you should have thought about it, my dear; it's not in your way, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, it is; Margaret and I both taught at home; only we've got out of the way of it; no one we knew taught here."

"As Mr. Elton is going to-day, Miss Carr will have help; but if she needs it at other times, we should like to go, that is, if you don't object, Fred," said Margaret.

I was called out of the room at that moment, and no more was said.

Having to visit a patient in his direction that evening, I rode part of the way back with young Elton; some allusion was made to his afternoon's work.

"You know, doctor, we have the one example to go by. *He* went about doing good," said Elton quite simply, and

reverently lifting his hat. I was touched by the young man's manner.

"It is a high example, and one that few of us imitate," I replied.

"And yet I fancy it simplifies life immensely," said my companion thoughtfully; "just the single rule of doing what lies before us, wherever we are, and because He shows us the work. Of course I don't mean anything unpractical or extraordinary; there's plenty of ordinary work for us ordinary busy people; those who go out of the way to do great things are the heroes of the army. We've one up in the north, near my station; that is, not more than a few hundred miles off; a kind of next-door neighbour with us. He's a clergyman; the best rider in the district; will take a stone fence at a gallop; no cant or nonsense about him, a thorough-going Christian soldier. We call him Jack the Giant-Killer, he goes about killing evils, and reminds me of a story I read about such another, in one of Miss Thackeray's Papers, I think it was."

"I should say a bush giant-killer found plenty to do," I remarked.

"Yes," said Elton, "and we can't all be giant-killers; but it's something to know there are some heroes left in these days."

As I rode home that night, I thought that my young friend was a hero too in his way; and it came to me to perceive, all at once, that a big giant had long stood in my own path; that his name was self, and that it was high time somebody set about killing him.

I hope since then I've tried to think a little more of other people, and a little less of my own ease; it's astonishing how much scope there is for this, when one once begins to see it.

I find this district more interesting to me; partly, per-

haps, because it is so different from any that I've seen before, and partly because I really feel to care about the people, and look out on it from the eyes of my *heart*, as well as from those of my head.

Things animate and inanimate find a place in my life, making it richer and more interesting.

Am I growing sentimental in my old age, or prosy? It will infallibly be either the one or the other, if I do not go back to hard facts.

Well, I was going to try to describe Lakeville and its agricultural surroundings. It is a good specimen of a thriving inland township.

About eighteen years ago the land here was first put up for sale, being then covered with a thick forest.

For a while it was thought that the township would gather nearer the main road to the neighbouring seaport; but want of water there drove the population in this direction.

Gradually the land was cleared, and found to be amazingly rich; a light chocolate soil, easily cultivated, and very prolific.

It is mainly taken up with farms of various sizes, the only squatters that remain being those whose ground is purchased.

Some of these let paddocks for the potato season, that is from September to April, at the rate of 5*l.* per acre, the average yield being about nine tons to the acre; I have even known small patches yield at the rate of fifteen.

The potato harvest is a curious sight. Towards the end of March, carts loaded with tents and cooking utensils, and filled with strange faces, may be seen wending their way towards the potato-ground.

There the tents are set up; men, women, and children are engaged digging, picking, and packing. The former

digging, the two latter picking up and arranging in heaps for packing.

Waggons are loaded for the neighbouring seaports, or drays filled for carriage to inland districts. You are surrounded by potatoes, large and small, bagged and heaped, under the ground, above the ground, on the road, on the wharf, in the steamer.

Many of those who come to gather, attend regularly every season; with the commencement of May they have disappeared, and the country has returned to its ordinary condition.

The majority of the smaller farmers are Irish, many of them own valuable pieces of land, and have saved money; but they will continue to occupy the most wretched hovels. I am in a state of habitual warfare on this subject.

Soon after my arrival I was called to a child ill of low fever, in one of these huts. From the appearance of the place, I concluded that the parents must be very poor, and yet I observed signs of plenty, in the shape of abundant and good food.

The hut stood in a hollow; a stagnant pool in front of it received such drainage as there was, besides being a receptacle for waste vegetables, and all sorts of filth.

Of course it was easy to account for frequent sickness in this family. I told the mother she could expect nothing else so long as she kept that open cesspool at her door.

"The other doctor tould me so when Dennis died," she said, alluding to a boy she had lost the previous autumn; "but he"—pointing to a paddock where her husband was working—"has been too busy to look after it."

Crossing over to speak to the man, I found the whole yard was a swamp, frequented by cows, pigs, and geese, with a colony of hens, routing in the manure heap.

Entering into conversation with him about the sanitary

condition of the property, I was surprised to find it was his own. "Why don't you build a decent cottage?" I asked.

"The place has served us this ten year, and sure it's like an ould friend," he replied, "we don't want to lave it."

"Oh, if you'd rather lose your children, I've nothing more to say; but mind, I've warned you."

"I'll see about it," said he.

The moist, warm weather changed; we had a fresh sea breeze, and the sick child rallied; the drain still remained unmade; they purposed to attend to it when ploughing was over.

Not long after I was sent for again, found the same child down with a relapse, the mother and baby stricken with the fever.

The father was now working vigorously at the drain, and making matters worse by stirring up the filth.

The children died; the mother struggled through the fever, but its effects remained in a painful disease; she was removed to the hospital in Bulla, and died there last week. Similar cases are not unfrequent; the wonder is there are not more. Nothing but the extreme healthiness of the district, swept by the bracing air of the ocean, keeps at bay the pestilence which the people invite by remaining in these miserable hovels.

I know a man who gave 70*l.* an acre for some land adjoining his own, and paid the money down, at the very time when he, his wife, and six children were inhabiting a hut, not half so well drained or convenient as a good stable.

This passion for acquiring land does not induce careful cultivation of it. English and Irish are alike in that respect.

Year after year the same exhausting crops are put in.

The land gets no rest. Rotation of crops is not thought of. Manuring is neglected; what comes out of the soil is never repaid. If the present system of farming be not changed, it must end in destroying the productiveness of this most fertile portion of Victoria.

The large landowners see this; some who formerly let their property in farms have resumed it, laid down the land in grass, and put on sheep, to give it time to recover.

Doubtless, ill-managed farms must be the result of encouraging people to take up land without sufficient capital to work it, persons too quite ignorant of agriculture.

Societies are being formed in many districts for the purpose of disseminating a knowledge of agriculture and encouraging a better system, and these societies are subsidized by Government.

The productiveness of the soil has *made* Lakeville and the adjacent town of Bulla, which is beautifully situated on a small bay of the great southern ocean.

Bulla is a fine thriving town, containing more than a thousand houses, nearly half of these having been built during the last half-dozen years.

It has a good pier; substantial wharves for the storing of wool or potatoes, for shipment to Melbourne, and other large centres; factories for making Maziena from potatoes, preserving meat, and manufacturing beet-sugar.

How the new railway line which is to pass through Lakeville will affect Bulla, I cannot say. If its trade fall off, the makings of a first-class watering-place will remain. With a little money spent on providing a secure bathing establishment, and the steam carriage bringing it within easy distance, Bulla should become the Scarborough of Victoria.

Lakeville, on the other hand, bids fair to be an inland centre. It already has two banks, a post and telegraph

office, court-house, and police-station, besides the mechanics' institute, library, and town-hall.

A Roman Catholic church, one of the handsomest out of Melbourne, marks the prevailing nationality, besides which there is a pretty and substantial English, and an ugly but substantial Scotch, church.

A Wesleyan chapel, with a wonderful pinnacle on the top, and a Baptist, standing on wooden legs, not to speak of "Primitives," Bible Christians, and the other sects which distract this country, in which there is no national Church.

The Roman Catholic priest is a courteous, gentlemanly man. A remark of his opened my eyes to the injury a number of sects do.

"They encourage," said he, "people to expect a church every man at his own door, and a clergyman to attend on him personally, humour all his whims, and, in fact, deliver the family religion at his door, just as the butcher and baker deliver their wares. Look, now," continued Father Payne, after we had exchanged greetings with the clergyman of the parish then passing, "look at that good man, he *is* a good man, though he does not belong to 'the' Church. My people like him almost as well as they like me. His best years have been passed in a continual effort to overtake the incessant visiting his people exact. If he relax at all, the people will not come to church; funds will suffer, financial managers will hint that if the minister cannot win the people, *they* cannot find money to pay him. Bah! *we* manage things better; we teach our people to *come* to their church, not to expect their church to come to them."

It was soon after I came to Lakeville that this conversation occurred. I had never been in the way of hearing much about church affairs.

I considered myself a Church of England man, and I

had a general idea that the clergy were gentlemen whom the Church looked after, while they, in their turn, looked after the people.

I suppose I did know that there was no national Church here, but it certainly never occurred to me that clergymen were in exactly the same position as that good man whom I used to hear from my garden in Mial, shouting at his prayers in Zoar Chapel, as if the Almighty were either very deaf or very inattentive.

When Mial got more settled, a young man had come there, who (I was told) was learning to be a clergyman, though how he could learn much there puzzled me, more especially as he had service in three other places, and was always in and out of somebody's house. However, that was not my affair. I paid my subscription to the church every now and then, but I never knew exactly who got the money, and I went to church once before the girls came, but I resolved to wait until the young man had learnt to read before I went again.

After Margaret and Helen arrived I went once with them. There was then another young man, the first having gone to some college, finding, I suppose, that he could not even learn to read at Mial.

His successor certainly read pretty well, but he did not know when to stop. If he had let us out at the end of the prayer-book service I should have gone again. The grand old words did one's heart good; they seemed to wrap one in their own solemn peace. I remember the gospel for the day was the story of the man who fell among thieves. The emphatic "Go, and do thou likewise," was given in the reader's best manner; but he could not send us home with the beautiful allegory and its impressive close sounding in our ears, he must needs produce a book, out of which he read a long wandering discourse, apparently written by somebody who was personally

acquainted with the invisible world and with the nature and purposes of its Creator.

I remember the discourse wound up with a peroration, supposed to be addressed by God to some wicked man, which appeared to me to be as irreverent as anything I had heard from the most reckless diggers.

Margaret and Helen endured heroically and went regularly. I did not.

Janet, who rather despises the English church, because "they read frae a buik," suggested that we should all become "hearers of the Rev. Mr. Macrakem," but she did not prevail on that point.

I had almost forgotten that we had a church, and was astonished at Father Payne's remarks respecting it.

Mentioning the subject to Edward Elton, I found that it was a sore one with him.

"It vexes and grieves me beyond anything to observe the condition of the Church of England in country districts throughout Victoria," he said. "I've never lived long enough in Melbourne to see much beneath the surface there, but I've seen, with my own eyes, the working of our system (or no-system) in several country parishes, and I've heard those who live in other parts of Victoria speak their minds on the same subject. It comes to this. The position of a clergyman in these localities is such that few educated men will endure it; the consequence is that the younger clergy are not the sort of men *we* have been used to see going into the Church. I fully admit that piety is the first requisite, but it's not the *only* one. For my part, I suspect that the piety which goes into the Church, because it's more respectable than standing behind the counter, is as much leavened with worldliness as that which does the same thing with the view of leading an easy life in a comfortable family living."

"I've never thought much about the matter," I

replied, "but I should say the man who is careless of his people because he is independent of them, would turn toady if he were dependent."

"Exactly; and a high-minded man, who could neither be careless nor time-serving, yet feels a delicacy in urging the duty of liberality on his people because he is personally interested."

"But is there no central organization to which both clergy and parishes are alike responsible?" I asked.

"*Practically*, none. Take such a locality as this for example; here are three small churches to be served, at distances of nine and twelve miles apart—a congregation of something over a hundred persons in the principal church, and perhaps forty or fifty in each of the other two; half a dozen hamlets to visit, scattered over a block of country twenty miles in one direction by fifteen in the other, besides lonely farms, forest huts, and out-stations, unapproachable except on horseback. Well, suppose this parish were vacant, the managing bodies of each church would meet and authorize an application to head-quarters for a clergyman, the income being stated at from 150*l.* to 200*l.*, provided the incumbent were active in visiting and liked by the people. One of the many over-tasked, under-paid clergymen of this diocese, thinking any change must be for the better, might accept the cure. Probably he would make a faint attempt at some kind of security in respect of income. Head-quarters might be moved to suggest such a thing to the local authorities, who would ignore the suggestion, and intimate that if the church were not kept open there was a Wesleyan chapel close by, to which the congregation could adjourn."

"Nonsense, Elton, Church of England people are not that sort."

"*Aren't* they? I tell you, doctor, I've seen this kind

of thing over and over again. There's no Church feeling among us; our Church is just *one* of a number of sects; if our parson doesn't please us, why, we'll go over the way to Little Bethel. Head-quarters knows this as well as I do. Church Committees (as they're called) have only to bully a bit, and everything is yielded. A clergyman is sent down; he finds a dilapidated parsonage; a church with a heavy debt on it; a people who expect him to be always journeying from one end of the parish to the other; to preach three times on Sunday; organize and often teach in Sunday-schools; deliver lectures in the week, get up tea-meetings and bazaars; preside at concerts, and, in some places, even theatricals, to help the debt on the church."

"Come, come, Elton, that's rather too much!"

"I assure you," he replied, "it's not long since I saw a country town placarded with bills, setting forth that a theatrical entertainment, in aid of St. ——'s Church, would be given on such a date."

"Well," said I, "they haven't come to that here at any rate."

"No; ALL these extravagances are not in every parish, but a good many of them are in most. A new parson finds them out by degrees. Probably the first time he inquires concerning the state of parish funds he hears that 'really the committee don't know how the stipend is to be paid, there is so much difficulty in getting in subscriptions. They hope Mr. —— will stir up the people,' &c., &c."

"I don't think a clergyman should have anything to do with collecting or receiving parochial contributions," I remarked.

"Certainly not," said Elton; "it places both him and his people in a mutually false position. Whether his stipend be large or small, he should receive it from some central authority—the local head of the church which he

represents—and not of the people to whom he ministers."

As Elton was speaking, Margaret and Helen came in from the township.

"We've just come back to tell you, Fred, that we're going over to the parsonage for the evening. It's Mr. Carr's night for service at the forest, and he's gone, and Jessie's so worried about it."

"Why is she worried?" I asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"Yes; the sergeant was up this afternoon to warn Mr. Carr against going. Some desperate characters, who have been stealing sheep, and are supposed to have an illicit still hidden away, have taken up their quarters there."

"And Jessie wanted Mr. Carr not to go to Rhona Springs," broke in Helen, "because he passes the worst part of the forest, and—what do you think he said?"

"Why, that he'd take his chance of a tussel. You look as excited as if you'd been having one yourself, missy," I replied.

"No, indeed, Fred," she said; "nothing of the kind; and *I* never have tussels; but I do like to see courage in a man."

"Shall we make a raid on the gang, Elton, to show our courage, or go as a body-guard to the parson?"

"Don't tease, Fred; *I* call it grand."

"But you haven't told us what it is yet, Miss Helen," cried Edward.

"Oh, Mr. Carr said he was one of the black police, and was bound to stand by his colours as much as the blue or red."

"I don't exactly follow his allusion to black police and coloured police."

"Why, the dress, Fred, of course. Clergy, police,

soldiers, and—I do hope he'll come home early, Jessie is so anxious."

"We promised to sit with her," said Margaret. "Will you be able to come and fetch us, or send Andy?"

"I should like to accompany you, Miss South, if you will allow me," Elton interposed. "I was intending to call at the parsonage. Perhaps the doctor will come also, and we shall take Miss Carr by storm."

I promised to look in later in the evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

An emu hunt.—A moonlight ride.—A victim.—"A marciful warning."—A good walk.

It was eight o'clock when I reached the parsonage. I found the party there, seated on the verandah, the evening being warm, and a young moon shining.

Elton was making conversation, and doing his best to interest the ladies in stories of his travels far north.

He was about to describe a journey he had made in search of new country, soon after abandoning the Upper Wells Station, near Lakeville. After I had paid my respects to Miss Carr, he continued,—

"I had a friend with me, and a couple of natives as guides. It was early summer when we left the Guinnam, going through a country pretty well occupied, though the stations were not very numerous. We made our way independent of them, and for more than a week never saw a human habitation. At the end of about ten days we reached an outlying station in the New England district, and, keeping still in a northerly direction, passed some fine country, abounding in picturesque scenery. I specially remember the Yelsey Falls. Approaching them from the south, we crossed open plains, 'rolling prairies,' as the Americans would call it; that is, undulating country, not exactly plains. In the hollows the view is limited enough; but from the top of every rise the eye ranges over a broad expanse of country, with few

trees or hills to impede the prospect. There is nothing to indicate that a river is near. As you advance the country becomes a little more broken, but the track is tolerably smooth, and the view uninterrupted by any visible obstacle. Suddenly a black chasm opens before you; looking into it, you see the river several hundred feet below. On the left are the Yelsey Falls, a thin stream of silver, descending perpendicularly between two mighty cliffs into a narrow gorge, lighted only by the reflection of the sun's rays from the water below. Far as the eye can reach the river pursues its way between enclosing hills, which rise abruptly—almost precipitously—from its narrow bed, presenting a mingled front of rock and foliage, at once singular and beautiful. The most remarkable feature, however, is the extraordinary way in which the hills interlace one another, so that the river runs in all directions; sometimes north, at others south, then west, or back again northwards. The general appearance of the plain is but little varied; a person standing near the Falls only sees the river just below him, and cannot trace its course, except by the serrated line formed by the interlocking of the different points as they advance on one bank or recede on the other. While gazing on this scene, I got sight of a flock of emus above the Falls. It being necessary to proceed in that direction, in order to cross the stream, we determined for once to give chase. I say for once, because a bushman on a journey knows that he entirely depends on his horse, and must be careful to husband his powers. But on this occasion the country was tempting for a gallop, the emus provokingly in the way, and we were short of food. We had with us a pair of capital kangaroo dogs, to whom, indeed, we were often indebted for a fresh roast. Riding very gently towards the birds, we hoped not to alarm them too soon, but their instinctive watchfulness warned

them of our approach. First one, then another reared up its long neck, to ascertain what enemy was at hand. I have heard of emus showing fight against a single man, even of attacking one, but we were too strong a party, and, after gazing steadily at us for a few seconds, they began to move, at first leisurely, and frequently looking back, as if to notice whether we were in pursuit. They were soon convinced of that, for we put our horses to the gallop, the hounds running in grand style. An emu at close quarters is a dangerous antagonist; with one stroke of his leg he could kill the best dog that ever ran a course. Our dogs were too valuable to be wantonly risked, so we kept them well with the horses. In about half an hour we were within a few yards of the chase. I urged my horse forward, and came alongside a noble bird; my first shot broke his thigh-bone; he fell, and rolled over on his back, kicking viciously at one of the dogs. My companion now came up, and, jumping from his horse, stunned the emu with a loaded riding-whip, after which the black fellows easily killed him. While we unsaddled and gave the horses a whisp down, leaving them to rest awhile, the game was skinned, a fire made, and an excellent luncheon prepared, of slices from the breast, grilled on a split stick, which did duty for a gridiron."

"It seems very cruel," said Helen; "I don't know how you had the heart to kill the poor bird."

"And it's very cruel of the butchers to kill sheep or bullocks, but you see we must eat."

"Ah, well, I dare say you were hungry, but hunting always does seem cruel, though I suppose it's not more so in reality than other ways of slaughtering animals."

"Not if they are killed immediately," said Elton.

While our friend was relating this incident, I noticed Miss Carr often stooped forward, as if to listen, and there was a tremble in her voice as she said, "I am glad you

have come back to us safely, after your many adventures."

"Thank you, but perhaps I may have to set out on others." As usual he looked at Margaret; she moved slightly, but did not speak.

"Did you settle any one in your new country?" asked Helen.

"I settled myself and my friend; we have the Upper Run between us; I send stock there to fatten, then bring them down to my home station to sell."

"Well, but you took up three or four hundred miles of country, your cattle don't want all that; lots of people might cultivate the ground, and get all sorts of things out of it."

"Thank you, Miss Helen, no Land Acts, if you please; you said you admired courage; don't you think the pioneers of a new country show a little, and shouldn't they count for something as well as your favourites, the Selectors?"

Their talk jarred upon me, I don't know why; I seemed to feel the tremulous motion of Miss Carr's hands, as she moved them restlessly, at one moment grasping the verandah rail, then plucking at the creepers, or pushing back her hair, as though it impeded her hearing.

"Try not to be so anxious," I said in a low tone, "I am sure it is all right; I'm going to ride up that way myself directly, and I shall wait for your father; you'll hear us coming home in full talk before long."

She rose quickly.

"Are you really going to the forest, doctor? No, no; I see it's only your kindness: I'm sure you've riding enough; I'll try not to mind."

But I had risen, and telling the others I should be back before they left, went off without another word.

I had not gone more than five or six miles, before I met

Mr. Carr, riding pretty fast; the moon shone on his lined face, and showed it quite calm and collected, though evidently on the watch; glancing sharply on each side the track which wound among the trees.

Seeing me he pulled up.

"Anything wrong, doctor, that you are going this way so late?"

"I only came to meet you; Miss Carr seemed uneasy."

"The sergeant frightened her this morning with some story about these splitters; unfortunately I was out when he came, or she should not have heard it."

"It's a pity ladies get so anxious," I said, "but it's nervous work, sitting at home waiting, no doubt."

"It's very kind of you, doctor, to have come out like this."

"Not at all; nothing is pleasanter than a moonlight ride."

The clergyman smiled.

"You have enough of that, I fancy, as well as myself," he said.

We rode on, conversing about the country, the people, &c. When we neared the parsonage, I indulged in a cooey, which brought a heap of fluttering muslins to the gate, evoking a storm of exclamations, questionings, and rejoicings, amid which we entered the house.

It was touching to see how the daughter waited on her father, watching his looks, anticipating his wants.

I noticed him lay his hand on hers as she passed his chair once; loving looks were exchanged between them, which, for the moment, made her calm, grave face beautiful.

Until this evening I had regarded Miss Carr as a reserved, rather cold-mannered woman; no longer young, and not at all attractive. Now I recognized that latent expression of "possibilities" in her face which I sometimes see in Helen's.

The half-protecting, half-tender, entirely loving look

that came into her eyes as they met her father's, glorified the whole countenance, and told what it might become if heart and mind had free play under favourable conditions.

The girls, even at that late hour, must needs take their coffee with the clergyman. Margaret is his great favourite; she now sat near him talking, young Elton occasionally joining in their conversation. Miss Carr and Helen, sitting apart, were speaking in low, earnest tones; they are close friends already, though the difference in their age is so great. It suits Helen's practical nature, to afford Jessie active help in her busy, unselfish life, which calls forth Helen's admiration and sympathy.

Jessie Carr is her father's housekeeper, companion, and chief help. When she was about fifteen her mother died, leaving two boys—one an infant, the other not three years old.

For many years Jessie had been an only child, and her parents lavished more care and money on her education than they could have afforded had there been other children.

Her father made time to initiate her in the more solid branches of learning; her mother taught her elegant accomplishments; both denied themselves to procure masters for her, and managed to send her to town for that purpose.

When the eldest boy came, however, things were altered. It had been hard enough before to find the means of giving Jessie educational advantages, now it would be simply impossible, so she returned home, was nurse to the baby, and afterwards to her mother, who never got really strong again, and died in giving birth to the second boy.

Elton had told me these circumstances very soon after our settlement in Mr. Carr's parish, and I remember he added, speaking of Mrs. Carr,—

"That woman was a victim to our precious system of church management. She kept up to the last, hiding her increasing weakness from her husband, who at that time had great parochial difficulties to contend with, doing more than she was at all equal to, till her strength utterly failed, and she just lay down and died. I recollect accompanying my brother to her funeral (being at that time but a lad myself). Brown, who was then medical man of this district, joined us returning. He was a Roman Catholic. 'I think, Mr. Elton,' said he, 'it is high time your Church went in for unmarried priests. It's little short of murder to expose tenderly-nurtured women to the harrassing cares and petty annoyances that poor woman struggled against so long.'

"I have always remembered Brown's words," added young Elton, "and I have seen them verified over and over again."

I remembered them now, as I sat looking on the worn face of the dead woman's daughter. The burden that had fallen from the mother rested on her. She had borne it bravely for fourteen years, but it had left its mark. At thirty years of age she looks older than many women of forty. Well she may, for few lives have been so laborious. She helped her father to educate the boys until it was necessary to send them to the grammar-school in Melbourne.

Clergymen's sons are received there at comparatively low fees. Still that small outlay is a heavy drain on their narrow incomes, and entails much personal sacrifice. Mr. Carr is his own groom and stable-boy; his daughter supplements the family resources by teaching. She is a good musician and artist. Twice a week she goes to Bulla and gives lessons. It was respecting her engagements on the morrow at Bulla that she and Helen were now talking.

I overheard the latter say,—

"If Fred does not object, I should like to go with you, and choose those crayons for myself, while you are giving the lessons."

"You had better let me get them," Miss Carr replied; "I don't think Doctor South will like your going by the coach; it's not very pleasant for ladies sometimes."

"But *you* go by it, so of course I could."

"I am older than you; besides, I *have* to do it."

It happened that I had business in Bulla myself. I proposed to drive them both over. Margaret declined to be left out, especially as she had some visits to pay there. So many passengers would be rather a close fit for my buggy, Elton therefore suggested that Margaret and himself should accompany us on horseback.

Before we had finally settled our plans for the morrow, Andy appeared breathless.

"Doctor, you're wanted; and I've been looking for you down at the school-house. I met Morris as I was coming up here, and he says, says he, 'I see the doctor riding down the township five minutes ago; he *was* a-going it, and no mistake: some one's took bad.' So I turned about when Morris tould me this, and went down to the school," added Andy, 'for,' thinks I to myself, ''tis the master's wife, I know she's expecting. When I got there they laughed at me. M'Illister he says, 'I see the doctor a riding home with the parson when I comed out of the Institute,' so I jist walked up the front way this time, for I expect I missed you taking the short road."

When Andy does open out it is difficult to stop him; however, I had him at the door before he had finished his explanations, and, learning where I was wanted, sent him home to get a fresh horse, saying I would follow immediately.

I returned to the room, and, telling the ladies to settle the Bulla expedition as they liked, took leave of Mr. and Miss Carr, and requested Elton to hurry the girls home.

Approaching the house, I heard Janet and Andy talking loudly.

"Charity begins at home," said Andy, quite in a passion.

"But it doesn't *end* there," retorted Janet. "I'm ashamed of ye, mon!"

"Why, Janet, what's the matter?" I cried. "Now, then, Andy, the mare."

"The mare, sir! 'Deed she's gone; it's Tom I'm giving a bit rub down and a morsel to eat before I saddle him again for ye. Women has no marcy!"

"'Twon't hurt Tom; *he* hasn't walked ninety-three miles to see *his* wife; and, for the matter o' that, there's not many *men* that would; leastways, I don't know any," Janet pointedly remarked.

Meantime I had walked to the stable myself, both of them following me. There was Tom, sure enough, getting some hay.

"Where's the mare, Andy? Be quiet, Janet!" for she commenced to speak.

"*She* have lent her to Hollis," said Andy.

"Saddle at once! Now then, Janet, what does it all mean?"

"Weel, sir, ye'll not be angry when ye hear the truth. It's only them as is daft that—weel, weel, I am coming to it," seeing I turned away impatiently—"Hollis comes in, says he, 'I want the doctor; the missus is took bad, and it's a marciful warning as has brought me—'

"'Why, Hollis, I thought ye was miles and miles away,' says I, after Andy was gone for ye, and he was just dragging hisself out through the yard tired-like. He leans upon the gate a minute, as if he was glad to rest, and

says he, 'so I was, Mrs. M'Kinlay, but I had a warning Sunday night. I fell asleep in the hut, as usual all alone, and I was woke up hearing mother a-groaning and a-moaning as plain as I'm talking this minute. Well, I sat up in a fright, and it stopped; the wind howled about the old place and shook the bit shutter as if some one was trying to get in. I got up and looked about, but there was no one. After a bit I laid down again; but it was long before I could sleep; when I did, I heard her agin; just the same moaning and groaning so as to wake me. I got up and walked away to the station, and so soon as 'twas daylight I went to the master and tould him I was going home. "Why," says he, "you had your cheque only Saturday, and sent it to your wife: there's nothing owing to you; it'll cost you ten pounds to go all that way if you don't wait for the Drays." He was put out with me for leaving the fencing, you see. "I'll come back and finish if ye haven't a better hand," says I, "but go I *must*." So I started Monday morning; that day I walks thirty-three miles; I had only sixty left then. I kept it up till late last night, till I'd done another thirty-three; that left me only twenty-seven for to-day, and I got in an hour agone. As I come in at the door my blood turns cold, for I heard the very same groaning and moaning as had come to me up in the Moama Forest. One of the children runs out. 'Where's mother?' says I; but I heard her, and in a minute was in the room, and she a-lying on the bed, wishing for me to be home. The baby's a-coming a month sooner than we expected—and she had a bad time with the last one, I do assure ye.' That's what Hollis told me, doctor, and I only ask ye, wasn't it enough to melt yer heart (*if* ye've got any—with a glance backward in Andy's direction) to think of the puir man walking ninety-three miles to be near his wife in her trouble? So I bid him take the mare back, counting I'd make it all right with you, sir, for sure ye'd

never fly in the face of Providence, which sent him the warning."

Before Janet had finished I was through the gate, but I think she was relieved to see me laugh as I rode away.

CHAPTER XX.

A complicated landscape.—Doctors at a discount.—Parish interests. — Church and Dissent. — Hummock glades.—Margaret.

THE next day I drove Miss Carr and Helen to Bulla, Elton and Margaret riding with us. A fresh breeze swept across the Hummocks; the sun shone brightly; even Jessie's spirits rose with the occasion, and the rest of the party responded gaily to the bracing influence of the clear air and extensive prospect. The surroundings of Lakeville were still novel to us. Certainly we were familiar with islands and lake, and the girls had been to the beach, but I had not found time as yet for that expedition.

Driving along the hill-side, I told Miss Carr how surprised we had been when the view burst on us for the first time.

"You would get it all at once from the top of that hill," said she. "My father is fond of bringing strangers from Bulla by that road, and drawing their attention to something else until the whole scene opens before them."

"It is magnificent! but we were more astonished than delighted at first."

"I have heard others express the same feeling. Have we not read of grand works of art producing a similar effect on some minds?"

"I think," said Helen, "it always needs time to take in

a new experience, especially if it be complicated by different details."

"Certainly the prospect here is complicated, if one may apply the term to nature," I remarked. "Our horizon at the present moment embraces very opposite features. On the extreme right we have the great ocean; on the extreme left the dark forest; between them lake, islands, hills, and valleys, endless variety of colour, from the brown bare fields, lately reaped, to the brilliant green of the potato land just ready for harvest; from the deep blue of the ocean to the yellow-green of the sheep paddocks, with glints besides of a shining river and trim garden plants in the distance."

"I wonder are there many such scenes in Australia?" asked Helen.

"In the Yarra Ranges and in Gipp's Land I have heard there are some bolder and grander; in the Buffalo Ranges too the scenery is very fine."

While we were talking Margaret and Elton had been flashing hither and thither like children out for a holiday, sometimes shooting ahead of us, at others lingering behind, or going off the road to examine some object of interest among the trees. They now rode up, proposing that we should return by the Hummocks.

"You have never been there, Fred," said Margaret, "and it will be splendid cantering on the sands. The tide will be out."

"I don't know whether it will be so splendid for the buggy; we are more weighty than you are, and not so independent."

"I think there is no risk, doctor," Elton interposed. "The crossing at the river's mouth is good, and all the rest is plain sailing."

Helen applauded the proposal.

"You know, Jessie," said she, "you were wishing to

go on the beach the other day; you said you had not been once this summer."

"Would you like it, Miss Carr?" I asked.

"Yes; if it would not make us too late home."

"How long will it take us, Elton?"

"Allow two hours, and you'll have a margin for taking note of gulls, sea-weed, shells, &c.; leave Bulla at 4.30 sharp—no lingering looks at shop-windows, Miss Margaret; no fingering of books or examining engravings, Miss Helen; no bandying of last words with your paragon, the doctor, Miss Jessie."

Whatever made me get so hot? I felt like a fool for a moment, much disposed to knock Elton off his horse, and looked up to ask what he meant; luckily no one was noticing me.

I heard Jessie's musical laugh. It is rare, but, when it does come, it concentrates the sweetness of a thousand ordinary ones.

"The good, brave doctor!" she said. "I seldom go to the parsonage for fear of missing the coach, but I meet him in the street sometimes, and whenever I have done so I come home the happier. It is a small thing, perhaps, yet the chivalrous air with which he puts me into the coach, standing, hat in hand, until we are off, sending kind messages to my father, somehow gives me fresh courage."

She was speaking to Helen; the others had ridden on.

"Take care, Fred!" just as I was driving straight on to an awkward stump.

It was a close shave; and the sudden jerk made the horses restive. By the time I had quieted them we were at the entrance of the town, and I asked Miss Carr where I should set her down. I fancied my voice sounded strangely, but neither of my companions appeared to notice any difference, so I carefully inquired which of

my fellow-practitioners was Miss Carr's favoured knight.

"Oh, don't flatter yourself!" cried Helen; "medical men are not a bit of a comfort except when you're ill. It's Doctor Helm, Jessie means; the clergyman, you know."

"Oh, indeed! Didn't Maggie say she wanted to call on Mrs. Helm?"

"Yes; Mrs. Helm came to Lakeville to see us because Mr. Elton had told her we were two girls alone here."

"Alone, indeed! I suppose doctors don't count as protectors any more than as comforts?"

"You know, Fred, I don't mean that; but it was kind of Mrs. Helm. 'Just like her,' Mr. Elton says; and he wants you to make acquaintance with the doctor; he has known him since he was a lad, and he says he owes much to his companionship and counsel.

"The doctor's admirers, at any rate, are enthusiastic," I said, as I assisted Miss Carr to alight at the house she had indicated.

"You will be among the number, Doctor South, when once you have met him," she remarked, adding, "I shall meet you at the parsonage, then."

Elton assured us of a warm welcome if we went there at once; but one of the horses wanted shoeing, so I determined to go first to the forge. Elton accompanied me thither while Margaret and Helen went to consult Mrs. Helm about their purchases.

It was afternoon before I had finished all my business and followed them to the parsonage. I found Elton and the doctor walking in the garden. Very few minutes sufficed to make me feel at home with him. His great learning and transparent simplicity of character are charmingly blended with real kindness of heart and cordial courtesy of manner.

It was not long before Miss Carr appeared. He went

to meet her, leading her in with a deferential air, as if he were attending on a queen, and said he, after she had gone in,—

"A queen she is; the crown of self-sacrifice is hers; a loving helpmate to her father, a tender mother to her brothers, hers is one of those lives of quiet heroism which glorify our common nature."

As Elton and I walked down for the horses, I remarked, "Your friend does not appear to be one of the half-paid, bullied, country parsons."

"No; his position and household are just such as every country parson's should be. There is plenty without extravagance, refinement without luxury. But Doctor Helm is part of Bulla. When it was an insignificant fishing-hamlet he held service here in turn with several other places, over a distance of fifty miles; in fact, my brother's station at Gras Town was a portion of his district at that time."

"Then Bulla has grown up before his eyes?" I remarked.

"Yes; and the Doctor is identified with it. He has been able to take up an independent position from the first; his private means, reputation for learning, and high character give him weight; yet, in spite of all, he has had some experience of parochial bullying. I believe his independent pecuniary position bore him through more than either his ability or conscientiousness."

"You are determined to substantiate your charges of bad church management. It is easy to see evils, but how would you remedy them?"

"No doubt there would be difficulties of detail in any scheme, but if the legislative authority of the Church would take the matter in hand, central bodies in each archdeaconry might be constituted, to whom every parish should be responsible for the regular payment of the in-

come it professes to raise. Reports of the financial affairs of each parish should be furnished to it, appointment to vacant cures in its hands, subject of course to the bishop's approval."

"Then you would make the clergyman independent of his parishioners?"

"I would constitute a regular authority to step in between him and them in secular matters; it would be fair to both parties. He would come among his people as the representative of the Church, not as the stipendiary pastor of a particular parish. The people would feel themselves a part of that Church, not an isolated congregation. He would be in a position to insist on the *duty* of liberally supporting the Church. Subscriptions would be more regular, if not larger, when claimed by an outside authority. I should then have some hope of seeing the narrow parochial feeling, so general now, disappear, and parishes coming to regard their interests as identical with those of the Church at large."

"Certainly, Elton, your plan would be a great advantage to the clergy, and equally to us laymen," I replied.

"The real condition of a parish could not then be covered up. If the parson were to blame, it would be known to the central body. An inefficient or indolent man would not then be able to ruin a parish without provoking official inquiry; on the other hand, ignorant, exacting congregations would not be able to overwork clergymen, and destroy their peace of mind by pecuniary anxieties. How can a man put his heart in his work when he sees his wife and children actually wanting the necessary comforts of life?"

"Surely that is not often the case?"

"I fear it is, and becoming more and more so in country places. If we are to depend entirely on the voluntary principle, parishes should be classified, and clerical services

apportioned on a reasonable system. A man is now set down to get what he can from his people; if they pay him, well; if they don't, there is no remedy. Unless he have private means, he can't leave for want of the money owing to him; and, if he did leave, another clergyman would be appointed, the former being still unpaid. These cases, so frequent now, could not happen if the clergy were paid from a common fund."

"But wealthy parishes would raise more than poor ones. You cannot have one uniform scale of remuneration."

"I would have a maximum and a minimum rate. Of course the most competent men would have the best churches and maximum incomes."

Elton was silent a few minutes, then added,—

"I suppose you, like Doctor Helm, will consider my scheme of levying a religious rate altogether Utopian?"

"I thought it was rather Utopian to get quit of religious rates; any way, I don't believe we shall see compulsory religious rates re-introduced in our day."

"I'm not so sure of that. Politics and fashion are just a see-saw; there's a great run in one direction, a sudden pull up, and then off again in the opposite. Awhile ago we were all for moral influence and peaceful arbitration; these are beginning to be depreciated, and a return to fisticuffs and national glory advocated. I calculate that the reaction from secularism is about due. I expect war and religion will come in together."

"And when that happy period of retrogression arrives, what is your grand panacea for keeping religion in fashion?" I asked.

"It won't be retrogression at all, doctor," said Elton, rather nettled; "I'm not so illiberal as to want the old church-rate introduced here, but I would apply the principle broadly, and levy a religious rate. The Government might do it in the interests of law and order. I suppose

nobody denies that religion helps these. *Now* the few who feel their responsibility do all the work of supporting religion in this Christian country, while the many who don't feel it share the advantage, but give no help. Suppose every man were assessed on some equitable scale, and required to specify, when paying his rate, which denomination should be credited with his money. Some men might object to give to any religious purpose; such should have the option of naming a charity as the recipient of their rate. If any refused to do that, I should divide his money between the local charities of his district."

"I fancy, Elton, we should have people going in for being martyrs to freedom of purse, &c."

"I don't see how any reasonable person could object to pay in proportion to his income, if he had the right of choosing where his money should go."

"Wouldn't such a scheme check private liberality?" I asked.

"On the contrary, the liberal man would be able to disperse his charity abroad, instead of being compelled (as he now often is) to narrow his practical sympathies to his own church and district."

"The dissenters would be dead against it; they wouldn't take the money."

"I don't know," said Elton; "I see a little of dissenters too in this colony. There are a good many sensible men among them, who see that the voluntary system will not meet the necessities of a new country, where the people are scattered about in forests and on diggings. Any dissenting body might surely take their share, and devote it to Bush Missions, and try to hinder the children there from growing up absolute heathens."

"That's a good idea!" said I; "I know something of the moral destitution of these young forest-denizens.

When I hear about Missions to the Chinese, &c., I often think I could name plenty of boys and girls with British blood in their veins, who are more like heathens than our Chinamen; certainly in the interests of society, a mission to these would be a practical good.—I have often been surprised, Elton, at the interest you take in these things," I remarked after a pause.

"I've a good deal of time to think; and I've seen a good deal of the country; and then, you know, at one time I thought of taking orders myself; so my attention has been directed that way."

"Indeed! I was not aware of that," I replied. "Do you regret not having entered the Church?"

"I'm afraid I don't now; I couldn't put my heart into work carried on under depressing influences; unless indeed—indeed," he hesitated, then said, in a hurried way, "unless I had no heart to put."

"In that case I should say you had better keep out of it, for I don't know any work that requires more heart; but with regard to your scheme, I advise you to go into Parliament, and air your notion of a religious rate. You shall have my vote. From what I hear, and the little I see, I begin to suspect our clergy are in an unfair position."

"Unfair? it's thoroughly unjust to bind them by the old Church ties, and at the same time to withdraw the old Church supports!" cried Elton.

"Don't get excited, my dear fellow, here are the ladies, wondering what has kept us so long."

We found them gathered round the parsonage gate as we came up with the horses.

"Who has been lingering now?" cried Margaret and Helen simultaneously.

"The attractions of the shop windows, I suppose," said Jessie quietly. We laughed.

"Indeed we have been busy discussing important

matters," said Elton, as he put Margaret on her horse, which became impatient, and could hardly be kept back. "The doctor will tell you all about it," he called out, as he followed her.

We found the sands pleasantly firm, and bowled along at a good rate. When we were near the entrance of the lane abutting on the main road Elton came up to us watch in hand.

"In spite of our delinquency, you see, we have fully half an hour to spare. Turn in here, and let me show you an excellent specimen of the Hummock glades."

He led the way through a division in the sand-hills, and we found ourselves near a few trees. Taking out the horses, we fastened them to these; then clambered up and down these billows of sand, until we reached an enclosure of thick tea-tree scrub. Elton forced an opening; we entered a circular basin, closed in by the dark scrub, and carpeted with short, soft grass of a brilliant green. A few scrub-like saplings dotted the glade; above the tea-tree enormous sand-hills towered; assuming all sorts of fantastic shapes. The roar of the surf came thundering through the narrow opening which served as a funnel through which the wind howled and whistled.

"Isn't it enchanting?" cried Margaret; "it's like a great big fairy's ring, I declare."

"I'm glad you didn't drag in the oasis-in-the-desert simile," said I. "Did you know of this lovely spot, Miss Carr?"

"Oh, yes, I've often been here; we generally try to have a little pic-nic when the boys are at home at Christmas; and this is a favourite place. It was you, Mr. Elton, who first told us of it, I think?"

"Yes; when I had the Upper Wells, I was one day riding after some cattle which had strayed; one of the

station hands was with me. We got all together except one calf. The man suggested going on a little way with the others, and letting the cow whose calf was missing drop out of the herd. We did so, I followed her quietly, she led me to this glade, where the calf was planted, under yonder bushes."

"A calf planted! was it dead?" asked Margaret.

"Don't you know," laughed Elton, "cows will leave their very young calves in certain places generally well covered in? This we call planting it; the calf will not move until the mother returns."

"We are much indebted to that particular cow or calf," I said. "Now I think we must be going; Miss Carr is looking at the sun."

"One moment, and follow me!" cried Elton, as he and Margaret commenced to ascend a great hummock. On reaching the top, we stood spell-bound for a moment. The setting sun lay like a mass of molten gold on the heaving ocean; a bank of purple clouds shot with crimson above it. The waters danced in the violet light, which bathed the white sails of a ship in the distance, her dark hull, thrown up into strong relief, shadowing a wall of tinted light. A few minutes the great golden ball quivered on the waves, then sank slowly from our sight.

Jessie drew a deep breath, and slid her hand into Helen's.

"Is it a picture of life's sunset?" she murmured, "the clouds and darkness behind, the brightness and glory just coming into view!"

Elton had taken Margaret's hand, and led her down the steep, without a word. I did the same for Jessie and Helen. None of us spoke much until we left the sands, and turned on the familiar road.

I then asked Elton what he supposed to be the height of the hummock we had ascended.

"About a hundred feet, I imagine," said he, and proceeded to tell us that the sand-hills farther west, which are now quite bare, were formerly covered with timber.

"Those two," said he, "standing out above the rest are called the sisters. The encroachment of the sand is becoming serious; every high tide in stormy weather increases the quantity, and drives it farther inland. The planting of bind-weed has been tried as a means of stopping its inroads; but so long as cattle are allowed to run here, it cannot be of much use."

I observed an opening had been cut from the swampy ground to the ocean.

"That," said Elton, "has been made to carry off the surplus waters, which with high tides and southerly gales flood the lower lands sometimes."

Among the incidents which have occurred since our arrival at Lakeville, this expedition to Bulla is the one most impressed on my memory. I recollect the conversations, even the looks and gestures of our little party. I suppose because it was a marked day in our household annals.

I noticed that Margaret and Elton lingered behind when we turned out of the lane, and afterwards, when we drew up at the parsonage, they were not in sight.

While I was assisting Miss Carr from the buggy, they rode quickly up, and, bidding her a hurried good night, were off again before we had started.

"Margaret is in a hurry," said I, for she was leading. Helen's head was bent down; I stooped to look into her face, her eyes were full of tears.

"I suppose, darling, your thought is like mine," I whispered.

"I don't know, I feel in a whirl, it is only to-day that it flashed across me."

"A remark of Andy's, while you were at the Wells,

suggested to me the possibility of losing Margaret," I rejoined; "since then it has occurred to me on several occasions, still I thought it might be fancy. You know her best; what is your opinion, Helen?"

"I have none at present, it has come so unexpectedly; yet when I consider the past in the light of to-day, I wonder I never thought of it before."

"We may be premature," I replied, handing her the reins, as I jumped out to open the yard gate.

CHAPTER XXI.

An explanation.—A little sparring.—Welcome visitors.—Jessie.—In Melbourne.—Our Queen's son.—"Don't you count?"—Meetings and greetings.—"There's nought about gentlemen in the Bible."—Hopes and plans.

MARGARET and her horse had both disappeared. Elton's was hanging up at the fence. He came from the stable to meet us.

"Where is Margaret?" I asked.

"She went in; I put up her horse; but Andy is there now."

The old man emerged from the stable.

"Well, Mr. Elton, I did think, sir, ye knew better than to bring in a horse in that state; and Miss Margaret's too! It's na the thing for young leddies to ride like jockeys."

"We did come pretty fast at the last," Elton acknowledged, in a smothered sort of tone.

"Pretty fast, indeed!" cried Andy. "Well, doctor, it's a marcy ye've no call to gang out the night; the beastees has had enough work, I trow."

"They'll be none the worse. Get Bob to help you rub them down." (Bob was a neighbour's boy, who lent a hand in the stable when wanted.)

Elton and I turned to the house.

"Your horse must be hot too," I said; "have him put up."

"No, I must be going; I forgot the horse. I suppose Andy is too cross to put a hand on him, but Bob will." He turned back to give directions.

Janet met us at the door.

"'Deed, sir, but ye're late! I misdoubt me this riding is not good for Miss Margaret; her head aches, and she can't see *nobody*," added Janet, emphasizing the nobody as though she meant somebody, and looking severely at Elton.

"What, Janet, are you angry with me too?" he said.

"Weel, sir, I meant no offence; and, saving your presence, doctor, I think Mr. Elton had better gang hame, for Miss Margaret's na like herself, and Miss Helen's downhearted too. Our young leddies is na used to so much gallivanting."

Elton looked worried and nervous, but determined.

"I must speak to you, doctor," he whispered quickly.

"Come, come, Janet, get us something to eat," said I, motioning him to pass in before me.

We stood facing each other under the lamp. He put out his hand. I noticed it tremble.

"You will be my friend," he entreated. "I *do* love her so! And indeed I'll devote my whole life to making her happy."

"Look here, Elton, I might pretend not to understand you, for you've told me nothing; but I begin to have a guess; and really it's so sudden that I don't know how to take it."

"Sudden! It seems to me as if every one must have understood my feelings long ago."

"You have spoken to Margaret, I conclude? How did she take it? Of course it rests wholly with herself."

"I can scarcely tell how she received what I said except that she wished to go on as we have been—satisfied in the present."

"You mean she wanted to postpone any decision?"

"I think she likes me. She said we had been so happy, and why couldn't we leave things as they are?"

"Why, indeed! Margaret is very young; there's plenty of time, Elton."

"I can't go on as we have done; I must have certainty. Besides, I shall be obliged to return to the station soon. I have stayed away too long already."

"I think it would be better to defer pressing this matter for a year; you will be down again then."

"Oh, doctor, don't send me away in suspense! I must know what hope there is for me."

"Well, as I said before, it rests with Margaret herself. How we could part from her, I don't know; it would be hard indeed on Helen; they have never been parted."

"Why should they be? I should never desire to separate Margaret from her family. The question is, will you let me be as one of you?"

"Look here, my dear fellow," said I, "Margaret's happiness is the one thing to be considered. I will do you the justice to say I would rather trust it to you than to any one I know."

"I have your permission, then, to prosecute my suit?"

"Don't hurry her; remember her youth and the seclusion in which she has been reared."

"I wish you to understand, doctor, that I am in a position to make a suitable settlement on her. If she wishes, I will sell the northern stations, though it would be better to keep them for awhile: they are paying well, and in a few years we should be able to settle wherever she pleased. Now we could spend half the year at the Wells and be near you."

"We need not go into that at present."

"No; only I wished you to understand."

"If I had thought about it, Elton, I should have given you credit for having considered what is due to the woman you love as well as to your own feelings. I know you're not one of the selfish sort."

"Then I may count on your influence?" he persisted.

"So far as to consent to Margaret's pleasing herself. And now for supper; I'm hungry; you ought to be: let us forget our anxieties."

Helen came in and sat with us during the meal. She was grave, but composed. I could see she was making an effort to control her excited spirits.

Elton was distrait and nervous, but imitated Helen in trying to appear calm. His manner to her was deprecatory, but tender withal, as if supplicating forgiveness for his meditated robbery, and a place in her affections.

Try, however, as we would, there was a constraint upon us all, and I was glad when our guest rose to go. As he was leaving, he said to me,—

"I must come to-morrow." Then with an effort, addressing Helen, "Please ask your sister to see me."

She held out her hand to him; he took it in both his with a fervent "Thank you."

When he was gone, Helen and I looked at each other.

"Come, pet," I said, drawing her on to my knee; "tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell," she replied. "Maggie seems bewildered, worn out with excitement. The headache was not a false plea. She will not be herself until she has slept."

"Elton is determined to have this out. I can see she will have to decide one way or the other."

"That is just what is worrying her; she wants to leave things as they are."

"I don't think that will be possible now," I said. "It can never be exactly the same again."

"I suppose not. But, dear me, how strange it is!" she added musingly. "Whatever should we do without Maggie?"

"Then you think she will take him?" I questioned.

"I fancy so, some day. I believe he has made his way into her heart."

I sighed. "Well, Helen, we must not be selfish. Whatever is for her happiness must be."

"Yes, yes; but it's a trial. I can't imagine living without Margaret."

"I'm a clumsy sort of companion for my dainty little sister, but I'll try and help her bear up," I said.

"Oh, Fred! you're not clumsy at all; you're our dear, darling, old brother. I ought never to be lonely with you. Then we have Jessie too, she's ever so nice if she hadn't so much to do."

"Ah! you'll consort together, and leave an old fellow like me out in the cold."

"Of course. What has an old fellow to do with young ladies?"

"What, indeed!" and I put her into a chair and went out to look at the night.

Presently a hand slipped into mine, and a coaxing voice said,—

"Did I hurt you, Fred? You know I was only joking. To think that I should joke to-night! But our talk put me in better spirits."

"That's right; I'm glad you have brightened up a bit."

"But you're not hurt, Fred?" she persisted.

"Hurt! I'm too thick-skinned to get hurt this time o' day. What's an old fellow good for but for young folks to laugh at?"

"Fred, I don't know you to-night. It's not like you to be bitter."

"Bitter am I? I didn't mean to be. I'm out of sorts to-night. In fact we're all upset. There's Janet fussing in and out every minute," cried I, returning to the dining-room, where Janet was pretending to make up the fire.

"'Tis too hot for a fire to-night, Janet."

"'Deed, sir, ye do look hot, not to say wild-like. I'm thinking we're all a bit dazed. Miss Helen, will she consort with him, d'ye think?"

"Janet, I can't tell. Is all quiet in our room?"

"She's sleeping like a infant, her cheek all wet, and giving a bit sob now and then. I crept in awhile ago to see if she'd have a cup o' tea, and there she lay so sweet-like, I can't say whether she's most like a child or a angel."

"Don't disturb her," I said; "sleep is the best restorer. Suppose we all try it, Janet? Things will shape out better by daylight."

"The Lord be gude to us, doctor! It's not to be thought that Miss Maggie can go to them savage lands where there's nought but black haythens. Mr. Edward should come to parts more becoming-like to a leddy."

"Time will show; good night, Janet; I advise everybody to go to bed."

It was some time, however, before I followed my own advice, and when I did, sleep would not come.

I heard Helen, too, moving softly, and knew that there was another watcher.

But I am not going in for describing the ups and downs of our household life during that period of disturbance. I did more riding than I had done since leaving Mial; somehow I never felt so comfortable as when I was on horseback going at full speed.

Elton came and went. Margaret asked for time. He submitted to wait, but resolutely pushed on his suit.

Margaret could not bear to be without Helen even for a few minutes, and Elton was always manœuvring for a *tête-à-tête*.

Helen had a difficult time of it. I fancy Andy had his share of hard times too, for Janet was in a state of chronic

tantrum. I heard him talking to Nero one day while he was gardening.

"Poor fellow! ye seem out of sorts too; no one to notice you. E'en the master's taken to riding like—weell, we'll na swear, Nero. But what the deil must there be such a rumpus for? It's all natural-like, ain't it, Nero?"

And Nero put his paw on the old man's arm, looking solemnly concerned at the folly of the world in general.

It was a relief to us all one morning to see my old friend William Elton drive up. Mrs. Elton was with him, and her eldest daughter.

Helen received her joyfully, Margaret shyly, while I went off to welcome her husband.

They remained with us a week. Elton's society did me good. We have always understood each other thoroughly. His plain common sense gives weight to what he says, while his genial, even temper exercises a peculiarly soothing influence on all about him.

He spoke to me of his brother and Margaret.

"You know me well enough, South, to be sure I would not desire this marriage if I were not satisfied it would be for your sister's happiness as well as Ted's. I only hope when Mary's turn comes" (glancing at his daughter, who was playing with Nero on the verandah) "that she will find as good a husband as Ted will make."

Mrs. Elton was going to remain at the Wells while her husband went to town to fetch his boys home for the winter holidays. As I had been subpœnaed to a trial which was to come on the same week, we determined to travel together; and it was arranged that Margaret and Helen should accompany Mrs. Elton to the Wells, and remain there during my absence.

I had long intended to get a new buggy, principally for my sisters' use, keeping the old one for myself on bush roads. This would be a good opportunity, though it would

delay my return a little. Elton intended leaving immediately after speech day. His family usually spent the winter holidays at the Wells, its climate being drier than that of Grasstown.

I don't know who first remarked what a pity it was to drive the new buggy up empty, or how it came about that I begged Mr. Carr to let me bring his boys up with me. They were not accustomed to come home except at Christmas, spending the shorter vacation in town. We knew that the expense of the journey was the reason. Here was a double chance. I could drive them up; Elton could take them down. Mrs. Elton intended accompanying him when the boys returned, so the big drag would have to be used, and a couple of boys more or less was of no account. We planned it all excellently, but had some little difficulty in obtaining Mr. Carr's consent.

I fancy he disliked accepting anything approaching to a favour. Helen, however, got Jessie on our side, and her father was persuaded to agree to what he longed for with all his heart.

The day before we were to start I drove my sisters to the Wells, Mr. and Mrs. Elton having preceded us. The former returned with me, Edward remaining with the ladies.

That evening we walked up to the parsonage a little late. I wanted a certificate from the clergyman of her parish concerning the character of the woman on whose trial I was subpœnaed. The case was a singular one, and has never been cleared up to this day.

A few months before I had been called to a farm-house in the forest beyond Lakeville. The farm had been long owned by a widow who bore an excellent character. She had one boy. A little before our coming to Lakeville she had married again. Her new husband was almost a stranger in the neighbourhood, and a drunkard. Quarrels

soon arose, and it was reported in the neighbourhood that they were going to separate.

When I reached the farm I found this man lying on the sofa in his house, face downwards, quite insensible, his head cut open in many places. The wounds had evidently been inflicted by some heavy blunt instrument—probably an axe. He lingered three days, but never recovered his senses. The police could get no clue to the murderer. Suspicion fell on his wife, as they were known to live unhappily together, and had been seen quarrelling that very day. The woman's story was that her husband came home the worse for drink, and threatened to beat her. She went away to their nearest neighbour, about half a mile distant, having sent her son to do an errand for her in the township. As night drew on she left her neighbour's house to return home, but came back in a very short time calling for assistance, and saying her husband was murdered. The neighbours accompanied her home, and found the man lying in the same state as when I arrived. The wife declared that was all she knew of the matter, but she was arrested; it was to her trial that I was now summoned. Her lawyer had written to me to obtain Mr. Carr's testimony to the character she had borne during her residence of many years in his parish.

When Elton and I reached the parsonage, we found Jessie reading aloud to her father. His books and papers lay on the table; a pile of needlework was by her side; they had been busy, but the day's labour was over. The father sat back in his worn leather chair, Jessie on a low stool by his side, the lamp behind her, its rays shining on her luxuriant hair and bringing out the classical contour of her head, which, to a stranger's eye, is perhaps her chief beauty. The threadbare carpet and shabby furniture looked tolerable in that artificial light, and Jessie has the art of giving an air of refinement to the poorest sur-

roundings. There are always flowers on her table. Now white chrysanthemums and shining laurel leaves brightened the room, the walls of which were covered with her drawings; well-filled book-shelves and an open piano supplied a chaste background for the figures seated by the fire.

"How cosy you look!" cried my friend as we entered.

"Come and share our cosiness," responded the clergyman heartily, while Jessie rose to draw chairs forward.

She is so used to caring for others that it comes naturally to her to do so. It was not until I took the chair from her that she seemed aware of what she was doing. Then she yielded the chair, saying,—

"Take care; you remember the back; it has been mended, but I won't answer for it if you fidget."

"As if I ever did, Miss Carr! But how will you guard against accidents in the case of the boys?"

"Oh, we bring in forms for them, they know our chairs are peculiarly sensitive. Only to think of having a whole fortnight with them! I have holiday too, and I shall be able to send them back so much better off for winter clothing," added she, glancing at her little machine and pile of work by its side.

"I'm not going to have you working this holiday, Jessie," said Elton. "You know Ted's going away soon; we must have a jolly fortnight to keep up his spirits as well as our own."

"We shall miss him terribly," Jessie replied. "It is always good to have him; good for oneself, and good for the parish."

"But, Miss Carr, to return to the point," said I; "you must promise to make general holiday."

"And come up to the Wells with the boys," added Elton. "Mr. Carr, you'll try to manage it, won't you?"

"Ay; it's not every day we can all be together, and in company with kind friends too."

I told him my errand; and obtained the certificate I had come for.

"I cannot believe her guilty," he said, "though it's very mysterious. Such a good, valuable woman as she has been! Why, she kept Edward's house for some years when he was at the Wells alone!"

"Yes," said Mr. Elton (he has sent in a testimonial in her favour also), "it *is* mysterious."

"If the boy were older, I should suspect him," said Jessie.

"In that case she would have known of it," I replied.

"Of course, but she would lay down her life to screen him."

As we shook hands, Jessie said,—

"I cannot *thank* you, Doctor South; I can only *feel* how *kind* you are."

I am sure so small a service did not deserve such warmth of gratitude as spoke in her tone. I said so, but she was gone, and I went home with something of the delightful feeling a sun-bath gives one in cold weather.

The next morning we started by the early coach.

On arriving in Melbourne, I accompanied my friend to the Grammar School, a handsome building on the St. Kilda Road, situated in extensive grounds. The class-rooms, refectories, dormitories, &c., are equal to any thing of the kind at home. Of course I am not comparing it with Harrow, or Winchester, or the great public schools of England, but with the ordinary grammar schools of the larger towns.

The head master is an elegant scholar; distinguished for kindliness of manners and active philanthropy, very popular among the boys, and an excellent teacher, yet. I heard on all sides that the Church of England Grammar School does not take the position which it ought to do among the public schools of Victoria.

Where the fault lies, if fault there be, I do not know, but I do know several Churchmen, who would sacrifice a good deal for their Church, who yet declare, they cannot bring themselves to jeopardize the education of their children. Elton is not satisfied, and talks of placing his younger boys at the Geelong Grammar School.

Mr. Carr is very well satisfied with the progress of his eldest son, Alfred, who comes directly under the head master, is clever, studious, and feels that he must pass.

We hope he will get an exhibition to help him through the University, and that he will be one of the few who have reflected credit on the school. John Carr is the opposite of his brother, he is quick, but dislikes study, he therefore learns nothing. If Mr. Carr had the means, I believe he would try what another school would do for him; but as he has not, he does not mean to let him matriculate at present.

I have heard both he and William Elton attribute the failing of the Grammar School to the want of practical organization which is so conspicuous in the management of the English Church in Victoria.

Said Edward Elton to me one day,—

"If I were called on to characterize the distinguishing features of the English Church here, I should name individual piety and collective waste of force."

But whatever may be the defects of the institution, we found our boys in excellent health and tiptop spirits. Alfred and John Carr in ecstasies at their unexpected good luck; and the Elton boys delighted at the prospect of "some fun," as they said.

We did not stay long with the boys, as they were busy preparing for Speech Day, which on this occasion was to be an unusually important affair, a son of our Queen, then visiting Melbourne, having consented to identify

himself with the youth of the colony, by presiding at the distribution of Prizes, on this Speech Day of the united Grammar Schools.[1]

Elton arranged to return home with his boys by the evening coach. I should drive mine up so soon as the trial was over.

On the morrow several hundred lads, attending the three principal Grammar Schools in Melbourne, assembled in the Exhibition Building, the bulk of them occupying the gallery. On a platform at the side were the picked pupils, who had been selected to give recitations, music, &c. The body of the hall was crowded with spectators, many, evidently family parties, might be detected by the half-nervous, half-triumphant glances they exchanged, while listening to their young relations. The Prince sat at a table covered with handsomely-bound books, on the dais at the upper end of the hall, surrounded by the masters. The boys acquitted themselves well. Some of the pieces were given with great spirit and true feeling. The music was creditable. I recollect a duet for four performers, on two pianos, which elicited great applause.

By and by the honour list was called; each lad stood forward as his name was read out, and came up to be presented to the Prince, who, in giving the prizes, addressed a few words of congratulation and encouragement to each recipient.

It was pleasant to see our Queen's son, himself not very long emerged from boyhood, interesting himself in the youth of England's youngest colony. I think that among all the public proceedings in which he took part, none could have left a pleasanter impression on his mind than

[1] An anachronism is here committed, it was the summer, not the winter vacation which was inaugurated by the Prince's distribution of the prizes. Here, as *elsewhere*, the circumstance is true, though details of time and place may be changed.

this one, when he saw himself surrounded by the honest, intelligent faces of these lads, representatives of the future of Victoria.

The colony certainly feels the importance of providing education on a broad, solid basis for its youth, on whom must devolve the work of consolidating what has been so rapidly built up, of rejecting much which has grown in the forcing-house of circumstances, of planting firmly on our soil what has proved really good, carrying on what has been well planned, and, I must add it, of bearing the brunt of those difficulties which our faulty and rash legislation will certainly bequeath to them. I left the building before the general exodus, and, watching the crowd stream out, called to mind the day when a shining luminary of our judicial bench, then a rollicking young barrister, attempting to leap a gully on this spot, missed his footing and fell in, cutting and wounding himself with the broken bottles, bones, &c., which then covered the place where this large hall now stands. Sic "venit" gloria mundi.

I saw Elton and his boys off that evening, then turned in to spend an hour with Doctor Wyse.

As usual he was very busy, and very cordial. He was greatly pleased to hear we liked our change to Lakeville, and were thankful to him as the means of bringing it about. He was polite enough to say that he understood the district had reason to be indebted to him also, for having procured my settlement there.

I felt proud to hear him say so. Compliment from the head of one's profession is worth having.

Replying to his inquiries after my sisters, I let him know we were afraid we should lose Margaret.

"Surely you didn't expect to keep those girls long!" he exclaimed.

"I never thought about it, but I do expect to keep Helen, at any rate."

"Then you'll be disappointed, Miss Margaret's the sweetly attractive one, Miss Helen the grandly magnificent one. Their fates will be accordingly."

"Helen is content to lavish her magnificence on me at present, I am glad to say."

"These things are infectious, you know, South, one wedding leads to two, perhaps three, hey?"

"There are but the two of them," I replied shortly.

"Don't you count?"

"I! absurd."

"My dear fellow, don't be angry, it used to be give and take in the matter of a joke between us, but if this is serious, I forbear."

I felt provoked at his mock gravity.

"Well, I suppose the prospect of losing Margaret has made the subject a sore one with me," said I, and soon after took my leave.

The next morning I was early in court, after giving my evidence, I remained to watch the trial.

The accused was acquitted on the ground that in the short time which elapsed between her departure from the neighbour's house and her return to it with the news of her husband's murder, it would not have been possible for her to have done the deed, removed all traces from her person, and accomplished the distance between the two houses.

The woman returned to her farm: at first she was shunned by the neighbours, but she has lived down their suspicions. The question, however, still remains, who else could have committed the murder?

That same year another mysterious tragedy was enacted in our immediate vicinity, which also has never been cleared up.

The lonely, secluded situation of many of these farm-houses affords opportunity for the commission of crimes, the perpetrators of which often escape detection.

On the morning after the trial I left town with Alfred and John Carr, travelling by rail to Geelong, where Andy was to meet us with the horses.

We found the old man waiting at the hotel, and soon set forth in a body to inspect the new buggy, which was much admired by the boys. Andy shook the wheels, tried the break, raised and lowered the hood, and examined the bolts.

"Well, Andy, what do you think of it?" I asked.

"Na doubt the young leddies would look well in it, master—in the town—but I'm thinking our roads 'll soon take the shine off it."

"We've some capital roads about us, Andy, and we needn't take it into the bush," I replied.

"No; the Wells station won't be so handy after a bit."

"Why! it can't move away," said Alfred Carr.

"But the people can, sir," Andy remarked; "and 'tis they that make the place."

"I hope Mr. Elton's not going away."

"Mr. Elton lives at Grastown, as ye're aware, sir," said Andy. "Mr. Edward, he's agoing back to the Northern wilds, and the Wells 'll be a long way off when they're gone, I reckon."

Andy had brought me a letter from Margaret, in which she said that she had engaged herself to Edward Elton; that he was to leave us before spring set in, and not return for a year.

"I thought, dear Fred," she added, "that I could tell you this better by letter, and also that I can never love you enough for all your kindness and care of us. Edward

says we shall show you that you have not lost a sister, but gained a brother."

Andy had not seen Geelong before, so we took him round this pretty sea-port. He was pleased with the walk on the heights overlooking the beautiful bay, but his great admiration was for the public gardens, which are tastefully laid out, and contain some rare plants.

On the following day we started for home, stayed one night on the road, and reached Lakeville late the next evening.

"Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" and the parsonage door flew open as the lads came tumbling out of the buggy.

It was a sight to see the joyful pride with which the clergyman greeted his sons, and the happy light in Jessie's eyes as she threw her arms round each.

Mr. Carr came to the carriage and thanked me warmly. Jessie held out her hand with a hearty "Welcome home."

As I drove on I heard the boys talking eagerly, and smiled to myself at the thought of the revolution they would make in that quiet household.

Margaret and Helen were waiting for me at the gate, Edward in the background. He had driven them over from the Wells that morning. I think my welcome was as warm as that accorded to my young passengers. It was pleasant to be at home; everything looked cheerful. Janet's "Hey, doctor, but ye look quite young in yer town clothes," and Nero's joyful demonstrations filled up the gaps between my sisters' questions and exclamations.

Edward came up, his hearty grasp of my hand eloquent of satisfaction and content.

We were a merry party at supper that night. I unfolded my budget of news and asked for theirs.

Margaret coloured; Elton, triumphantly happy, exclaimed,—

"We're all one family now, doctor; so I'll make no secret of my news. What I most longed for I've got—with a drawback certainly—but still it's much," laying his hand on Margaret's. "She's promised to be my wife, only I must serve for her a whole year; it does seem long, but hope will brighten it."

"A year, man! Why, it's nothing! How many shall we spend without her!" and I looked at Helen.

She smiled. Assured of her sister's attachment to Edward, Helen had schooled herself not to mar their happiness by the sight of her regrets.

"Oh, Fred, it's not a case of doing without Margaret. The fact is we shall have to put up with Edward and his crotchets."

"Which is the last?" I asked, following her lead, to change the conversation. "Any new project for teaching young people who don't want to be taught, or for establishing perambulating churches and coffee-houses combined?"

"I only wish I saw my way to it," said Edward; "but it may come in time."

"Talking of schoolmasters," cried Helen, "you should have heard our conversation with Jacob Rose this afternoon. Jessie is what she calls getting up her parish arrears during the holidays. She had been to see Mrs. Rose. Passing just after we asked Jacob (who was in the garden) if that was not Miss Carr going up the lane. 'Ay,' said he, 'she've a been to see my missus at last; it's not often she crosses the door-stone except folks is sick, when they don't want no visitors. The Primatives is better off than we; their minister's wife and daughter 'll come quite friendly and take a dish of tea with Holmes' wife yonder.' 'But, Jacob, Mr. Carr has the whole dis-

trict to visit, not just a small congregation; it's unreasonable to expect him to be so often at each house.' 'I wasn't a saying anything about *Mister* Carr,' he remarked doggedly. Then I told him how Jessie was engaged teaching at Bulla, and how much she has to do always. The old man shook his head. 'It's to keep them boys at the Melbourne school, I trow. Why be'ant our own grammar school good enough? It's not becoming in a minister to be so grand-like with his boys.'"

I interrupted her story.

"Really, Helen, I should have lost patience with that idiot."

"Margaret did. She asked him, 'Does a minister cease to be a gentleman, and drag his family down with him?' Jacob looked at her severely. 'A minister's a minister, Miss South; there's nought about gentlemen in the Bible, nor about Latin and Greek neither.'"

"Then I spoiled all Helen had been trying to do," cried Margaret. "I reminded him of Pilate's inscription, forgetting that I was playing into the enemy's hands. Jacob was down on me in a minute. You should have seen his superb air of contempt! 'Ye're right, ma'am; 'tis mentioned, and fitting too in the mouth of a nignorant haythen.' I felt annihilated; Helen was laughing; so we walked on, leaving Jacob master of the situation."

Helen's little anecdote had accomplished her object of drawing Margaret back into the conversation unrestrainedly, and they proceeded to tell me how they had spent their time at the Wells, and what holiday plans had been made there to include us all.

"We want you to come up next week," said Edward. "We must have a battue. The kangaroo are coming down pretty thick since the cold weather set in; we must do something with them before the rains come, or there will

be small chance of the early grass. We thought of getting up a battue next Wednesday. If the young ladies will let me drive them up on Monday, I will bring in the drag on Sunday; we could take Miss Carr and her brothers also, and you could ride up."

"It's all cut and dried, I perceive. I have nothing to do but submit," I said.

"Fred, we shall not go unless you do!" cried both the girls.

"Oh, I'll go, my dears, barring professional calls. Have you said anything to Miss Carr about it?"

"Not yet; we waited for you to return and the boys to arrive."

As I accompanied Elton to his horse that night he told me that he must leave very soon, but that he hoped to return early next year.

"I think," said he, "five or six years at most will see me clear of the Guinnam stations; meantime I shall commence a new house on the Wells property; the present one is old, and not in the best situation. I think the ridge opposite it would be a good site; but I want you to decide that when you come up next week. I shall call for tenders at once. A contract can be taken and the stonework done during my absence."

"There's plenty of time, Edward," I said.

"Yes; Margaret will not fix any definite time for our marriage, but I think she will go back with me next winter; then the house here could be got ready for our return about the following Christmas."

"You seem to have made great way with your plans," I remarked.

"Say you are content, Doctor South," he entreated; "that you willingly give her to me."

"With all my heart; entirely content," and we shook hands cordially.

The girls were standing, candle in hand, when I returned to the dining-room.

"Good night, Fred; it's so nice to have you home again!" cried Helen, as I kissed my earnest-hearted pet.

I drew her close to Margaret. "God bless our darling," said I, "and make her as happy as her brother and sister desire!"

The ready tears welled up. "Oh, Fred, if all of us could keep together!"

"Edward being the *all of us*," I said laughing.

"No, no; you and Helen too."

"So we shall, my dear, I hope. In our hearts we shall always feel as one family. You must make haste and get rich enough to live near us."

"I don't mind about being rich," she said.

"No; only a man must work out his life fairly, you know; not shirking difficulties or even disagreeables. Edward has got the stations; it would be foolish to throw away his advantages, after all the trouble he has taken to bring them within his reach. My Maggie has been a helpful daughter and sister, and she will be a brave, helpful wife."

It is not my way to make speeches or take part in scenes, but I was a good deal moved by late events. The affections which my young sisters have drawn out have given domestic life a sacredness in my eyes which I never before perceived.

I think if they had been with me earlier, I should not have wasted my best years in alternating fits of cynical bitterness and indolent dreaming.

Truly the advent which I regarded as the hanging of a domestic mill-stone about my neck has proved the inlet of fresh life and pure air to my soul.

I feel too that I can go about my work better and take more interest in professional duties. There is fair scope

here for their intelligent exercise, and opportunity for keeping pace with the progress of medical science. Bulla has a hospital and infirmary. The medical men there are much above average country practitioners.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Boys.

I HAVE said very little of *living* pictures in our Lakeville district, or of the great individual vicissitudes common to early colonial life. Those who have been closely associated with me necessarily appear in these sketches. I have not, however, aimed at depicting character, only at reproducing incidents and scenes calculated to convey a fair idea of our ordinary life, which, isolated as it often is from natural ties and old associations, abounds in singular and striking specimens of human character. Men do not here jostle one another so closely as in older countries; personal peculiarities have space for development; our loosely organized society in bush districts is favourable to the growth of individual eccentricity. At least this is how I account for some of the oddities I frequently meet, whose true histories would, in many cases, be regarded as too sensational even for this sensational age to accept.

At one time I was inclined to allow some of these to appear in the present writing, but I happened lately to hear one of them dilating on his wife's many accomplishments.

"To put it fairly, doctor," said he, winding up the list, "she does a bit of every mortal thing."

It occurred to me that these sketches would bear the same discursive aspect, if local curiosities of character, in

addition to life and scenery, appeared in them. I therefore refrained, and, indeed, my own interests have so widened of late that I have less eye for the observation of eccentricity in my neighbours.

On my return from Melbourne there was no end of arrears of work to make up. I was out early on the following morning.

While getting my late dinner the girls told me they expected a visit from Mr. Carr and the boys.

"They wanted to see you, and we told them you would not be at home till night," said Margaret. "We want them to decide about going to the station. They were just going out when we called, and nothing was settled."

Presently our friends arrived, Miss Carr looking bright and animated, bandying jokes with the boys.

"They are brimful of curiosity, doctor," said she, "about your sisters, your house, and your dog, not forgetting Janet either, for Andy's decided opinions and brevity of expression have conveyed a great idea of superiority in the kitchen department."

"While my grimness and oddity have awaked curiosity in reference to the parlour," I exclaimed.

"Indeed, we're not curious; we only want to see Nero, and Janet, 'wha clavers for the twa,'" said Jack, imitating Andy's accent.

"Jessie's always talking of Helen, and Mr. Edward's been our chum so long, we want to see Miss Margaret," cried Alfred. Then, seeing Maggie got very red, and that his remark provoked a general smile, Alfred got red himself, and subsided behind his sister.

Soon, however, they made friends with us all, from Nero downward, and were deep in consultation with the girls and Edward about the proposed kangaroo battue.

Mr. Carr and Jessie were interested in my account of the united speech-day proceedings.

Presently Elton said, "I hope, Miss Carr, you have decided to come with us to the station."

Jessie hesitated, but her father answered promptly,—

"Thank you; it will do her good. I know she wishes it."

"Yes, father, I do wish it, but I shall not be comfortable to leave you so long alone."

"Tut, child! I shall be all right. Besides, I'll ride up during the week."

"Not on Monday; you have so much riding on Sundays."

I interrupted them to propose that Mr. Carr should drive up with me; and we decided to endeavour to arrange our work so as to be absent a couple of days, leaving word where we might be found in case of emergency, the Wells being within a few hours of Lakeville.

Janet ingratiated herself with the boys by producing a large dish of flummery and some mulled wine which Andy had made himself from our Mial vineyard.

After they were gone, she remarked that, "Master Alfred had Miss Carr's grave ways, and that summat in the eye which drew the heart out of ye like; but Master Jack, he's the fine brisk lad, wha's like the blithe sunshine dancing on the floor."

Edward Elton, who still lingered, observed that he wanted Mr. Carr to let Jack go with him and learn station work when Alfred went up to matriculate.

"An active life is what he is made for," said Edward. "I hope I may be able to give him a chance."

"Will Alfred be a clergyman?" asked Helen.

"I fancy, in spite of all that's come and gone, his father wishes it," replied Elton; "but Alfred, like most clergymen's sons, has seen too much, and yet perhaps *not* enough, behind the scenes to desire it himself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the outside difficulties are plain to him, but he is too young to appreciate the inward compensations."

"I was lately reading somewhere," Margaret remarked, "that many of our greatest statesmen, lawyers, and soldiers have been reared in English country parsonages."

"A different atmosphere indeed to Victorian country parsonages," said Edward.

"But many English clergymen are poor," Margaret replied.

"Yes; but their incomes, if small, are assured; their lives are not fretted out by paltry congregational squabbles, nor their energies expended on getting up excitement meetings to supplement parochial funds."

"Mr. Carr does not have that kind of thing."

"No; he has maintained his independence, but at what a cost! Straitened means, incessant labour, lonely home for himself, a narrowed out-look, and motherless youth for his children."

"I think," said Helen, "we overlook his secret source of happiness—the consciousness of having been useful and faithful in his service."

"You are right, Helen," Elton responded. "Whatever else fails him, the Master will not fail him."

Edward is the only young man I know who thinks in this way. I am sure he always feels the faith he rarely expresses. He is thoroughly consistent and practical. I have entire confidence concerning Margaret's future happiness. It will be a hard struggle for her when he is gone. We must do all we can to help her bear up. I see she puts off the thought of his departure as much as possible.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A kangaroo battue.—Too late!—Just in time!

Well, the parting is over. Margaret bore up bravely; Elton was the worst of the two; for his sake she kept bright and hopeful.

He left us last week. The boys have gone too, but Jessie has not had time to be lonely; Helen engages her in no end of walks, drives, and evenings when she is at home. Jessie quite understands it is by way of keeping Margaret occupied and helping to make the time pass pleasantly until she can hear of Edward's arrival at Guinnam.

We have been to Bulla three times lately on Jessie's lesson days. Mrs. Helm has invited the girls, and has herself spent a couple of days with us. I believe Edward privately asked this of her.

What with one help and another, we are getting through this trial pretty well. I did dread it for my bright sister, but all has gone better than I expected.

My writing has fallen behind of late; now, when we settle down, I shall have more time. To-night I am alone, and shall try to recall the incidents of our late visit to the Wells.

It was very pleasant; not so gay as that which we paid our friends in their own house at Grastown, but quietly enjoyable.

Short days and long evenings brought us more together indoors, though the rains had not then set in.

Station life in winter must be dreary where the family is small. The roads are generally passable only on horseback. There is little visiting or out-door exercise, except for the male members of the household, who mount leather leggings and boots made to defy mud and water.

Grastown is very wet. Mr. and Mrs. Elton usually spend a part of the winter at the Wells, which, though the house is not good, has the advantage of being near a made road.

Not that the family would be dull at Grastown. During the summer season, needlework waits for winter time, when Mrs. Elton produces alarming piles of it wherewith to occupy the female portion of the household.

Elton puts off his reading to the same leisure season, and has a varied collection of books to keep the ladies amused while their fingers are busy. Then there is the piano, or a fine cabinet organ, both in requisition nearly every evening, to say nothing of dancing on cold nights for the young people, or besique, cribbage, and bagatelle.

This latter game has suggested to Edward the building of a billiard-room in his new house, which, he said to his brother, "will ensure your still coming down to keep *our* house aired in winter." The "our" seemed to come very naturally to him. Margaret, at first shy, fell into it by degrees.

My friend William Elton told me that his wife soon brought her short up—to yes or no—after my departure for Melbourne.

Helen and I were gratified to observe how entirely she was regarded as one of the Elton family, and how easily she fitted in to her place among them.

The chief event of general interest during our visit was,

of course, the battue. The kangaroos had been unusually destructive; numbers had come down and were hanging about the station. Any evening about dusk, large flocks of them might be seen in the wooded parts of the run. Two, more daring than the rest, had come into the fowl-yard, greatly to the dismay of the hens and guinea-fowl. Elton's nearer neighbours had been invited to the battue, and on the appointed morning a good party assembled. Of course all were on horseback; we proceeded to enter the forest in different directions, so as to form an arc of a large circle, having for its centre the yard into which the kangaroos were to be driven. This yard was formed by a rough fence of boughs and brushwood, supported by stakes driven into the ground at various distances, enclosing at least a couple of acres, the fence all round being about seven feet high; at one end the yard was contracted to a narrow opening only a few yards in width, from which the fence again opened out on either side in a continually diverging direction for a distance of about a hundred and fifty yards from the mouth of the enclosure.

The object of this is to enclose the kangaroos within these spreading arms, as they are driven from the forest, in order that, when they rush forward, they shall find only the narrow opening in front; expecting to escape, they will bound through this opening, and are at once enclosed in the yard, the high fence of which is as a wall on every side.

On this occasion our little party kept pretty well together, forming one wing of the hunt, which was spread over a considerable distance. We rode out about six miles before turning. The parties composing the other wings of the hunt did the same. Of course we were widely scattered from each other; but at the time previously appointed, all the wings commenced a simultaneous return towards the yard. Then began a chorus of noises,

—shouting, cracking of stock-whips, yelling from every male voice in the forest, aided by the barking of a number of dogs accompanying the hunt. The startled kangaroos commenced to retreat, but in whatever direction they turned, they were met by similar noises, except on the side towards the yard.

The circle gradually diminished, and we heard each other's voices, faintly at first, then more and more distinctly as the contracting circle brought us nearer to each other.

The kangaroos finding only one side free from the alarming sounds, bounded on in that direction.

Soon they were to be seen in large numbers, leaping forward at full speed, becoming more and more terrified at the fast approach of their enemies. Then the scene became very exciting. We kept our horses at a smart canter, dashing along through the trees, and over the fallen logs, in good style. The girls enjoyed the ride, and kept well up, giving us no trouble in taking care of them. As we approached the outer arms of the yard, it became our duty to get rather in advance of the flying game, so as to insure their not passing on one side the fence, and so escaping the trap prepared for them. The hunters at the other wings did the same; and, as the centre did not press on at the same ratio, we were very successful, and yarded about fourteen hundred kangaroos by three o'clock in the afternoon.

Then commenced a work of slaughter, justified only by the actual necessities of the case, the kangaroos being so numerous as to occasion serious loss to the settlers, not only by the amount of grass which they consume, but also by the disturbance which their presence causes among the sheep.

With the slaughter of the animals, however, we had nothing to do. Men, who make a trade of it for the sake

of the skins; being in attendance. The kangaroos once fairly yarded were handed over to these men, who shot the creatures from stands in the fence; after which they would dry and prepare the skins for the market. The carcases are partially burned—I say, partially; the scene of a kangaroo battue is not a place to pass for some time afterwards.

Many squatters adopt the plan which Edward Elton told us he had done at Guinnam, always employing a couple of men on the run to keep down the kangaroos. These men draw rations, but do not receive wages, the sale of the skins being sufficient remuneration. They live on the outskirts of the station, and are wholly occupied in shooting the creatures. This arrangement is perhaps more effectual, and less troublesome than that of a battue.

While we were at the Wells a circumstance occurred which brought out Edward's pluck and presence of mind.

It was slaughtering day. About half a dozen beasts had been driven into the yards, a man going among them with a long pole in his hand to separate the animal selected for killing, and to let the others into the adjoining yard, from whence they would again be turned out on the run.

This work of separation involves a little risk, but the men employed are watchful and active, an accident is therefore of rare occurrence. If a beast attempts to rush, the surrounding fence affords a ready escape; on it other men are placed to warn their comrade, or assist him in case of danger. In the present instance, however, the bullock was unusually vicious, and gored the man in the loins before he had time to get to the top of the fence, the horn making a deep flesh wound in the upper part of his leg, while the lower part of his body was bruised by being squeezed between the animal's head and the fence;

his companions, however, speedily rescued him, and got him to the nearest hut. By the time I had attended to the wounds, and made arrangements for having the man watched until next morning, when I should be able to judge better the extent of shock which his system had sustained, and the amount of rallying power on which I might calculate, it was too late to turn out the beasts from the slaughter-yard.

The next morning, being quite satisfied as to the condition of my patient, I went down with Edward to the yards where the accident had occurred. Some station hands had preceded us, but, to avoid risk of another accident, Edward carried a rifle to shoot the bullock. As we approached we observed a great commotion in the yards, both among men and beasts; the latter had just been let out into the next enclosure, leaving the one appointed for slaughter by himself in the first yard. He was pawing the ground, and rushing from side to side in angry excitement. As we neared the place, he made a furious rush at the slip rails, and carried them away before him. Edward and myself stood directly in his path; on he came, mad with rage! "Take to the tree," cried Edward, "you've no arms." Mechanically I obeyed, vaguely thinking he would do the same; but, no, with perfect calmness, and wonderful nerve, he put his rifle at full cock, and waited a few seconds. The bullock came towards him with tail erect, and head bent to the ground, he reserved his fire until it was within two or three yards of him. The least tremor in his arm must have been fatal —the falling of a branch, the sudden rushing up of a dog, anything to have occasioned the slightest movement. I thought of Margaret, and could scarcely control my excitement. The whole thing occupied but a few seconds; hours it appeared to me, ere the rifle flashed, and the beast fell literally at Edward's feet; for the impetus of

its speed carried it over the short space which had been between it and him when Edward fired. This scene brought vividly to my mind the experience of twenty years ago, when I hunted wild cattle in the Siock Valley, on my first visit to the bush of Australia.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Our parson.—Sheep-washing in the old way.—"Not enough to keep a fellow in 'baccy."—Swag-men.—Hidden fires and bush fires.—Fire-worship.—Christmas in the colonies.—The bush on fire!—A race for life.—A scene of desolation.

I RETURNED to Lakeville on the evening of the day which had seen Edward's short encounter with the bullock. The man who had been hurt was progressing favourably, and indeed was soon about again.

Jessie, being anxious to get home, drove down with me, leaving her brothers to come with Margaret and Helen on the following Saturday, Mrs. Elton having begged for their company a few days longer. Naturally Edward's family wished to keep him with them as much as possible during the remainder of his short stay, and when Margaret was at Lakeville he spent every spare moment there. However, he brought them all home at the appointed time, remaining over Sunday with us.

A beautiful cabinet organ had arrived during the girls' absence—Edward's present to Helen. Both she and Margaret admire these instruments greatly. Jessie excels in sacred music, and she had given them a few lessons on the church organ which she plays.

Now that Helen possesses a very much better instrument, Jessie often comes to our house to enjoy it herself and to give my sisters hints in its manipulation. "Not altogether from disinterested motives," she says, "but

in hopes of getting a substitute sometimes on Sundays."

I am not musical myself, but it seems to me that to sit in the gloaming and listen to the delicious tones Jessie draws from the organ would waken a love of music in the most insensible breast.

I see a good deal of Mr. Carr just now, low fever having been very prevalent in the district during the early spring. We frequently meet at the houses of the sick. As a rule, I consider the visits of clergymen in illness objectionable, calculated to excite the patient, and so do more harm to the body than good to the soul. But I cannot say this of our Lakeville parson. He shows both judgment and tact by the sick-bed, and is a help rather than a hindrance to convalescence.

We often ride homewards together, and I find that, under a very unpretending exterior, he possesses a fund of good sense and keen observation which make him a most agreeable companion. No one who sees his life can doubt his piety and devotion to his profession, yet he never obtrudes religious topics, only you feel that his conversation tends to an elevated tone of mind, and draws out the heart's better feelings.

Jessie has confided to Helen that her father is glad of my companionship; he has had so few opportunities of mixing with his equals in point of education, that (as he himself says) his "brains have grown rusty from want of friction."

We have had a quiet, pleasant winter, our chief excitement being the arrival of Edward's letters, which keep us *au courant* of events on the Guinnam.

Sometimes he has written to me, and I gather from his letters that he also is fully posted up in our Lakeville proceedings.

Shearing is a little later here than it was in the Mial

district, but now that spring has set in William Elton has come down to the Wells, and we have been there for the first time since Edward's departure.

I think Margaret felt it a little, but we were soon interested in examining the progress made with the new house. Before Edward left he made arrangements for commencing to build; it now begins to show, though only the stone-work will be done at present. It is substantial, and on a handsome scale.

It will be a great comfort to us to have Margaret so near during half the year, and lessens the pain we naturally feel at the prospect of losing her.

Janet very seldom makes a journey; in fact, I imagine the two journeys of her life have been that from Scotland to Australia and this later one from Mial to Lakeville. She has, however, often expressed a wish to see the new house, and at length succeeded in bracing her faith sufficiently to accompany us to the Wells. Her impression is that our Lakeville home will suddenly collapse if she leaves it, and Andy be found nowhere. However, after many cautions to Andy, and much preparation, she ventured, and I think was rewarded by the satisfaction she felt at sight of the "grand-looking house preparing for Miss Margaret," which Mr. Edward had told her "was going to take the shine out of all the station homesteads that side the country," a superiority which Janet regards as but fitting, for—

"Where, sir, will ye find the like o' our young leddies?" she asked triumphantly of William Elton, who was admiring Margaret's future home, and pointing out the excellence of its arrangements.

"I am afraid, Janet," said he, "both you and the doctor are optimists. Nothing but perfection will suit you. Now, there's my own daughter and Miss Carr."

"Aweel, sir, I count Miss Jessie as one o' our own leddies."

"Oh, indeed! I wasn't aware of that," said Elton maliciously. "I'm sure I beg your pardon, doctor."

I certainly felt provoked with Elton and angry with Janet.

"Why should you beg my pardon?" said I crossly; "I'm not responsible for Janet's absurdity."

As I walked away I heard Janet's favourite exclamation,—

"The Lord send us gude luck!" adding, sotto voce, "the doctor's na himself sometimes lately."

We went down to the sheep-wash. The girls had not seen shearing before. The shearing arrangements at the Wells are by no means of the best kind. At a station nearer Bulla I am told the sheep-wash, shearing-houses, &c. are very perfect, a portion of the lake being utilized for that purpose, the paddocks abutting on it belonging to that station. At the Wells the old method is still followed; a portion of the creek side is enclosed, one small opening to the water being left. In that opening is fixed a slanting board which narrows more and more towards the water. The sheep to be washed are driven into the enclosure, and then, one by one, on to the slanting board, when they reach the end of the board they are pushed over and find themselves in about three feet of water. Tubs are fixed along the creek in which three or four men stand. As each sheep makes its way across the creek these men seize it one after the other, dip it under water, and rub the fleece, then it is allowed to escape into a paddock on the farther side, where it is left to dry.

At a little distance is the shearing-house, surrounded by a large yard divided into pens; each pen has a gate communicating separately with the shearing-house. A man stationed in the yard keeps the pens full.

Each shearer opens his own gate, pulls the nearest sheep into the house, dexterously uses his shears, and turns it out by an opposite gate which leads into another paddock.

As the fleece comes off the shearer rolls it together and tosses it to the receiver, who sorts and makes a preliminary classification of the fleeces before they are carefully resorted and packed in bales.

I cannot describe the superior methods in practice at some stations, as I have only been on those where this or similar plans are in use.

Edward writes word that shearing is over with him, that he is mustering cattle, marking off horses for the market, and beginning to anticipate his return to Lakeville.

The weather has become suddenly warm and dry. People say great care must be taken this year in respect to bush fires, because the wet spring has caused such a luxuriant growth of grass.

At Mial the grass never grew very long or thick. The ground had been so turned up in the search for gold that there was seldom much feed outside fences for anything but goats. That gravelly soil is very different from this rich volcanic loam about Lakeville.

Mr. Carr tells me bush fires are quite common, owing chiefly to the carelessness of the swag-men, who are an institution in the colony.

It would perhaps be unjust to say that all swag-men are mere loafers, but certainly the majority are so; they hang about labour offices and other public places in town during winter; so soon as the fine weather sets in they may be seen in hundreds, with the swag on their backs, and carrying the inevitable billy, making their way into the country, ostensibly in search of employment; some on foot, some on horseback, levying black mail in the shape

of rations at every station, or begging food and money in the townships.

If a squatter be daring enough to refuse their demands, the probability is that his fences or outbuildings will be found on fire.

Even where rations and shelter have been supplied, I have known swag-men tear up the floor of the hut they were allowed to sleep in for firing rather than take the trouble to walk a few yards to pick up wood. Sometimes they will do a little work to procure money for drink, but work is not their object.

Mr. Carr told me that the previous summer the proprietor of a boiling-down establishment had authorized him to offer fifteen shillings a week and rations to as many men as he chose to send thither. He made the offer to several swag-men, but not one would accept it. "It's not enough to keep a fellow in 'baccy," was the reply he got.

Eleven of them that year were camped by the lake side, near the parsonage, for more than two months. How they lived no one knew; they were professedly in search of employment. Mr. Carr often threatened to call the attention of the police to these unlicensed occupiers of Crown lands, but Jessie always begged him not to interfere. She supplied their wants at first, being in terror lest their fences should be burned. At length, however, she summoned courage to make an appeal to a strong-looking, middle-aged man, who came one morning for breakfast.

She told him they were poor themselves; that her father, a much older man than he, worked very hard; that many of the cottagers were sick, and needed such luxuries as they could afford to give.

"If we give to strangers, we cannot to our own sick people; and I hope," said she simply, "you will not ask

unless you are really in want, because to take from us is to rob the sick poor."

The result proved that even a swag-man has a conscience, and that it may be reached. The man begged her pardon and withdrew, quite subdued; it was many weeks before the parsonage was again visited by any of his craft, plainly he had told the others; the gang by the lake side soon after dispersed.

It is these men who originate bush fires; sometimes carelessly, by lighting a fire and leaving it burning. If a high wind arise, the sparks will be carried to the grasses and undergrowth; fences, huts, ricks, and homesteads are speedily in flames. Sometimes a swag-man, lighting his pipe, will drop the match on to the dry grass, and a flame of fire is quickly running along the ground.

This year the Government have affixed notices to the trees and fences, recommending caution on account of the quantity of grass, and offering a reward for the apprehension of offenders. While on the subject of swag-men, I must mention a little anecdote Mr. Carr told me.

He was awakened early one morning by a person who wanted particularly to speak to "his riv'rence."

On entering the kitchen, beyond which his visitor refused to go, the clergyman found a dilapidated-looking individual, with one eye blackened and swollen, the other had a merry twinkle in it as he commenced,—

"I'm sorry to throuble yer riv'rence, but I've heard say as ye're good to the sick. I was drunk last night, and this morning I'm ill all over; nought will set me right but wetting t'other eye; will yer riv'rence give me half-a-crown to get drunk again to-day, then to-morrow I'll be all right and brisk, sir?"

Said the parson,—

"I didn't know whether to laugh at the fellow, or to kick him out; however, I adopted a middle course, telling

him he was rightly served by having to suffer, to be off at once, and mend his ways before he came to me again."

Jessie always maintains that the man deserved the half-a-crown for his supreme impudence.

These are the men who form the bulk of the unemployed; they are a very injurious element in colonial life; an army of reckless fellows, who have nothing to lose, and everything to gain, by public disturbances. Refusing to work at a moderate wage, they hinder the investment of capital in undertakings of general utility, and keep up the price of labour, while the profits of industrial enterprise are not proportionate. They help to fill our gaols, and people our hospitals or benevolent asylums when sick or old; to say nothing of the tax they are on country people, and the destruction of property they occasion.

Riding homeward last week with Mr. Carr, we passed a tree to which was affixed the Government placard concerning bush fires. This led him to tell me how he was returning from his distant church one Sunday last year, in time for the afternoon service; approaching Lakeville on one side, he could see his congregation wending their way thither on the other.

Suddenly he observed several stop, then hurriedly cross the road towards a cottage, standing in a small paddock, which belonged to a woman whose husband had lately died.

Turning in the same direction, he perceived the yard enveloped in smoke; another moment, and a tongue of flame shot up, disclosing a heap of straw on fire, and the fence already caught. Not half a dozen yards from it was a stack of wheat, on which the widow mainly depended for her winter stores of seed and necessaries.

One glance showed the extreme peril of the situation.

Presently the parson was among his parishioners, all of them working desperately, half-blinded with smoke and dust, to break off communication between the burning portion of the fence and that which was close to the stack. A heap of manure, shovelled on to the straw, kept down the flame there until it burnt out. Tarpaulins were thrown over the rick, and continually wetted. With much exertion the burning fence was got under, and that on the side of the stack torn down. At length the rick was safe, and the congregation adjourned to the parsonage tank to wash and refresh themselves, after which they assembled in church.

The service was short, but hearty; and (said Parson Carr), "As I donned my priestly garments that Sunday, I did not feel my office the less sacred, nor did my people feel the service the less solemn, because half an hour before we had hustled one another in shirt-sleeves, striving to save the widow's rick."

It is three months since Mr. Carr told me this. How well I remember the light that shone in his eye as he lifted it upwards, silently thankful that it had fallen to his lot to vindicate the dignity of practical charity! He spoke little afterwards until we parted in the township. I am not likely to forget that ride.

As I write, our worthy pastor, whose people never knew how well they loved him until now, lies at the point of death.

I have this afternoon sent a telegram to Doctor Wyse on my own responsibility, begging him to come by the steamer which leaves Melbourne to-night.

My telegram ran thus,—

"You said you would come for a marriage; come now, and try to save a precious life. Come to help one inexpressibly dear."

Our great trouble has torn away all flimsy disguises; I

know now that my life is bound up in Jessie's; that what touches her touches me to the very depths of my soul.

Our great trouble has broken down barriers too; and, though not a word has been spoken, I think she understands. Involuntarily she leans on me; I feel that she trusts me.

While waiting a reply to my telegram, I will endeavour to recall the sad events of the past few weeks.

I have said that we had heavy late spring rains this year; that the weather became suddenly warm and dry, when summer, at length, really set in.

People were on their guard against bush fires; it was hoped that the precautions taken would ward off serious disaster.

Most of the farmers watched for a suitable day, and burned a margin all round their fences, inside cultivation paddocks, and by homesteads. A broad strip of bare ground will generally check a fire; the danger is, when the wind is high, of burning pieces being carried through the air.

About Christmas we had many small fires. The hillside, on Christmas eve, presented a grand appearance. The day had been hot, it was a dark, sultry night. The north wind, which had been blowing violently, lulled at sunset.

Returning late from a distant visit, I counted eleven separate fires. Seven were comparatively near; three of these being on different parts of the Island, which had been purposely set on fire to keep down the thick undergrowth of ferns, &c.

When I reached home, I found my sisters had gone to the parsonage; and Janet told me, as she served dinner, that Miss Margaret was in grand spirits, having had a letter from Mr. Edward, who said he was about ready to leave the Guinnam, and hoped to be down next month.

"You see, doctor," said she, "how sorry the young leddies is that he can't be here for Christmas; but *I* think we needn't be very sorry we're together by ourselves this once more."

Janet regards herself as an integral portion of the family.

She likes Edward, but cannot quite forgive him for breaking in on our domestic circle.

Presently I went up to the parsonage, and asked them to come out on the hill to look at the fires; the more distant were reflected in the dark sky, the nearer ones in the lake producing the appearance of fire above, below, and around, by the light of which we discerned heavy clouds of smoke, still and lurid, hanging about the horizon, obscuring the stars in that direction, and filling the air with a dense, oppressive smell. Immediately overhead the magnificent southern constellations shone out, tranquil and clear.

"I could fancy them," cried Helen, "the searching eyes of creatures, far removed from this lower world, gazing on its turmoil and changes, with the serene gaze of an unchanging eternity."

"Helen has always some far-fetched notion," said Margaret; "let us leave the spirits alone, and rather fancy we look out on the valley of the hundred fires."

"I think your notion is about as far-fetched as Helen's," I remarked; "I wonder what it is in nature that suggests such a variety of hidden analogies, and sets the imagination wandering in all sorts of unpractical, vague regions?"

"So that even our prosaic brother, who professes to have no imagination, cannot resist the influence, but must needs bring us out here to share it," retorted Helen.

"Don't you think the worship of fire a most natural religion?" asked Jessie.

"I suppose it *was* the grandest of idolatries," said Mr. Carr, "unless, indeed, we take mythology as intentionally symbolizing the moral virtues. I imagine the more thoughtful among the fire-worshippers regarded its irresistible force and power of destroying impurity as appropriate attributes, symbolizing those brilliant orbs through which the mighty Spirit had manifested Himself. Fire and wind appear to have always had a peculiar attraction for the poetic temperament."

"I suppose," said Jessie, "that is the most truth-searching, truth-apprehending temperament."

"At any rate, it is the one through whom the Creator has generally spoken," replied her father.

"That is the temperament which instinctively personifies nature," I remarked. "Fire spirits, earth genii, wood nymphs, and tree satyrs among the Greeks; animal and reptile demi-gods among the Easterns."

"There was a germ of truth in it, though," said Jessie, thoughtfully; "or it never would have been so universal. Did it not teach that every natural form is of God, and therefore, in a degree, a manifestation of Himself, which is certainly a more cheering view of nature than that which is coming into vogue now?"

"How, Miss Carr?" I asked.

"I mean the habit of regarding natural phenomena as the result of fixed law, the outcome of a blind force."

"Certainly the idea of a personal Creator, moved by attributes of which we have some conception, brings Him nearer to us," I said; "but is that a vision of the fancy, or a truth of the heart?"

"An ineradicable truth of the heart," she replied. "Truth is not bare and hard, as you material philosophers would make it."

"Fred is not a material philosopher, he is arguing against himself when he argues that way," cried Helen.

"Stop, Helen, give me time to regain my equilibrium after the compliment Miss Carr has paid me. A philosopher! I haven't an atom of the philosopher about me, unless a kind of lazy dreaminess goes to the making of one."

"The Bible teaches us to see in the sudden changes of nature the volition of a personal Creator," said the clergyman. "It is the Eternal, whose chariot is flaming fire, and who rideth upon the wings of the wind. It is *His* voice that shaketh the mountains, the lightning goeth forth from *His* throne. *He* fashioneth the heart of man, and showeth him *His* ways."

Mr. Carr was silent a moment, then added impressively, "Be sure that in taking away from nature her personal Creator, you take away her soul, and rob man of one of his purest sources of happiness."

At that moment the boys joined us. Nero had disturbed an opossum; in chasing it, they roused a couple of black Joeys, well-known denizens of the hill-side. Nero is old, and not so active as he used to be; after one or two tumbles, he went head over heels into a wombat-hole, and the boys after him. Master Jack got a cut on his face, and Alfred had bruised his arm. Old Nero got a good shaking, and was very stiff for some time after; since that he has eschewed opossums and kangaroos, and confines himself to the garden, or a sober walk in the township.

Turning to take a last look at the fires, as we went homewards, Jack sagely remarked,—

"Perhaps Sodom and Gomorrah looked something like that, after the towns were gone; it says, the smoke of the country went up like a furnace, you know."

"See now," said Helen, "even wild Jack feels nature's mysterious power of suggesting analogies."

"Oh, Miss Helen, no 'ologies, if you please; it's

holidays now!" cried Jack, setting off to run down the hill, and vainly inviting Nero to follow.

We had a quiet, happy Christmas, such an one as we shall all like to look back on by-and-by, associating it with the memory of our self-denying, simple-hearted clergyman, who, I fear, will not see another Christmas.

I met him on Christmas morning, going to hold early service at his distant church.

"I begin to enjoy the luxury of an old man," he called out, leaning back in his gig, and pointing proudly to Alfred, who was driving him.

"It's a luxury that most of us are content to wait for, sir," I replied.

He was back before noon, taking his duty in Lakeville Church; the girls had asked me to arrange my work so as to accompany them to church that morning.

They did not say, though I know it was in the thoughts of both, that another Christmas would bring changes, that we never could be exactly the same again.

There was no holly or berries to decorate our little church, but it was bright with shining laurels, white lilies, and graceful ferns, forming a most chaste adornment.

Scripture legends were placed scroll fashion about the chancel and prayer desk. So far as we can, in this new country, we like to follow the customs of our fathers, in the old land, which is still home to many of us.

Jessie's voice rang out, loud and clear, in the Christmas anthem. In his sermon, the preacher dwelt on the world-wide influence which the Christmas story has exercised, and reminded us of the thousands of our fellow-Christians who would that day listen to the same glad tidings, join in the same prayers, and raise like songs of thanksgiving.

"The old words, the old prayers, the old songs," said he, "which have cheered the hearts, and supported

the faith of millions of our brethren, who have gone before us to the deathless land."

Was he thinking of his lost wife? Did my sisters think of their mother? I wondered, smiling to myself at the recollections of my boyish passion for her, which once had seemed so real.

I know now what a deep tender love is; how different from the restless passion of my youth!

But the preacher stopped, and presently, with earnestly uttered benediction, dismissed the congregation.

Mr. Carr would not dine with us, he liked to have his children about him, in their own home, on Christmas day; but in the evening they all came down, and we sat on the verandah in the warm night air, listening to carol and anthem, that brought to mind Christmases in our native land, when the churchyard was thick with snow, some of which had been swept from the church path, and stood out a pure wall of white on each side of it.

How we talked of our English homes! Mr. Carr told his boys anecdotes of their grandfather's parishioners, and of the wonderful choir, consisting of bass viol, flute, and fiddle, which tuned up with extra fervour on Christmas-days!

His own and his wife's father had both been clergymen in England.

I could detect a lingering regret that neither of his sons desired to follow in their steps. I think Alfred *felt* the unspoken regret, for he slipped his arm into his father's, saying,—

"One can serve outside the tabernacle as well as in, you know, father."

"Ay, my boy, *only* let us be sure that we *do* serve," replied the clergyman.

I dwell on these little details of our Christmas evening, for it was the last of many happy, peaceful ones.

Two days after it, the committee of the Lakeville public cemetery held their annual meeting. Mr. Carr and I were both present; it was late in the afternoon; our business was nearly finished, when we were startled by the passing of several horsemen at full gallop. Looking from the lodge window, we observed the riders urging their horses to their utmost speed; another, and another rushed past; and the sexton's wife came in to tell us, that the Wells Run was on fire; the wool-shed burned, and the house in great peril. This we afterwards found to be an exaggeration.

Of course the meeting broke up; we rode quickly off to the scene of danger.

A violent hot wind was blowing; as we approached the forest, it presented a grand sight.

Columns of smoke were driven before the wind, leaving the fiery deluge clear on our side. It ran along the ground, licking up every blade of grass, every leaf, every twig; a devouring monster, now lightsome, and crawling, now standing erect, darting forth tongues of flame, creeping through the hollow trees, issuing out at the top, and stretching triumphantly towards the lurid sky.

It seized in its devastating arms grown trees and tender saplings; now wreathing each branch and bough into fantastic fiery forms; now casting up brilliant rockets, which the wind, hurling hither and thither, caught, twisted, and tossed in the widest eddies, flinging burning brands on every side.

The fences had caught; sheep, cattle, and horses rushed wildly forward, making for egress on the farther side, kangaroos mingling boldly among the domestic animals. Occasionally we caught sight of a terrified opossum endeavouring to escape from his tree. Flocks of parrots, and other birds, whirled in the thick air, their shrill cries heard above the noise of wind and roar of flame. In an

occasional lull, the ground would seem to tremble, as some giant of the forest fell to the earth, or a mob of horses fled before the remorseless element.

Approaching the home station, we found men had turned out from all parts of the neighbourhood. Some formed a cordon round the house, others about the out-buildings, while fresh arrivals occupied themselves wherever help was needed. Most of them were armed with stout bags, fastened to long sticks, these were kept wet, and used to beat the flames back.

Those who had no bags took thick boughs dipped in water, and used them in a similar way.

The house and stacks were covered with wet tarpaulins, and a great gap had been made in the fence, to stop the fire on that side.

Fronting the house is a large, round hill, covered with grass; here the flames surged and rolled like waves on a stormy sea. Men with blackened faces and torn garments encircled this hill, breathlessly contending with the devouring element, and successfully keeping it in check; for even *this* mighty force gives way before the mightier force of the human will.

A large hollow stump, whose top and branches had been long since used for fuel, stood on the farther side of this hill.

Suddenly a flash, a loud report, and a gnarled root, which had withstood the efforts of the woodcutter for years, splintered into a hundred pieces, scattering a shower of rockets in the air. Formerly attempts must have been vainly made to blast it; the powder remaining in now ignited, carrying a fiery shower to a field of lately-reaped barley, which had hitherto been considered safe, being on the north side of the creek, near which the fire had originated.

This barley had been hastily thrown together, the in-

tention being to remake and add to it after holiday-time. The stubble had not been thoroughly raked, loose pieces blew about, and the enclosure was speedily a sea of fire.

A few men went to break down the farther fence, but we could not spare many in that direction.

Somebody, however, remembered the cottage, which stood in a hollow beyond the barley paddock.

I saw Mr. Carr throw down the hose which he had been using on the tarpaulins, and make for the creek.

At the same instant the thought of the cottage flashed on me also, and I followed him. The mother of the family who lived there was helpless, and suffering from a painful cancer; her husband was, I knew, absent; there were several children; the eldest, a girl of fourteen, nursed her mother, and cared for the little ones.

When we reached the place, by a circuitous route, the fire was coming rapidly down on them; the fence nearest the creek had caught, and a pig-sty close to it was already in flames.

The younger children stood at the farther end of the enclosure, crying; the elder girl, with dilated eyes and terror-stricken face, appeared at the door as Mr. Carr approached. I gained on him, and was at his side before he entered the little yard.

Not a moment was to be lost.

"I am the strongest, leave the woman to me," was all I said. Mr. Carr, without a word, seized three of the smallest children, and made for the creek path, by which we had come, calling on the others to follow him closely.

I found the woman senseless on the threshold. She had crawled from her bed, and dragged herself so far.

Wrapping her in a blanket, I bade the brave girl, who would not leave her mother, go on in front. She waited till I had lifted my burden, and even wanted to carry a portion of the blanket, which I had managed awkwardly.

"Run, child, or the fire will reach us!" I cried; "your mother is safe if you don't hinder."

It was a close race; pieces of burning wood, flaming shingles, flew thickly about; we did not escape without some slight burns.

Resting a moment to take breath, on the other side of the creek, I looked back towards the place where the hut we had so lately left had stood; through the smoke I could discern only a blackened patch of ground, and a charred chimney yet standing erect.

These cottages, built of wood, roofed with shingle, and lined with calico, go like so much tinder, when once the fire catches them.

We deposited the sick woman in a stone dairy belonging to the homestead. Ere we issued from it all danger was over. A cool south breeze had sprung up, of which the eddy which had fired the barley paddock had been the precursor. The heavens were clouded, the rain commenced to fall in torrents.

"Thank God!" said the parson, wiping his heated brow, and I then noticed how exhausted he looked.

The overseer's wife produced refreshments for the men, and begged us to join them, but it was already dark. Mr. Carr was anxious to get home, so was I, we therefore started in the rain.

We rode back through the forest, lately the scene of such thrilling excitement; it was now blackened and desolate, great rain-drops pattering against charred trees alone broke its solemn silence.

Some of the trees still shot out tongues of flame from their hollow trunks, but the ground was one bare black scene of desolation.

We rode as quickly as the impediments in our way would allow, but before entering Lakeville both of us were drenched to the skin.

I observed my companion shiver, and, when we reached the parsonage, I said,—

"Promise that you will have some brandy and go to bed."

"I think I will," he replied, "I feel both hot and cold."

CHAPTER XXV.

A sad ending to the holidays.—An anxious time.

I PARTED from Mr. Carr at the door of his house, went home and followed my own advice, though I did not feel hot, only very wet and very tired.

The next morning I went up to the parsonage and found Mr. Carr still in bed, complaining of aches in his bones and violent pain in the head. Still we thought it was only a cold and reaction from the excitement of the previous day.

I persuaded him to take the medicine I brought him, and he seemed better next day.

It was Saturday; he made an effort to rise and prepare for Sunday duty; but he was languid, and suffering still from his head.

We urged him to give up the Sunday work, at least the distant service, but he would not.

After it was over he sat for some time exhausted in the vestry, and, on Jessie going to him, said, "I think, my child, I am going to be ill; I cannot properly see you."

She took him by the arm and led him into the house, and has since told me, begged him to let her send for me; but he would not hear of it, saying all he needed was a good night's rest, which he had not had since the fire; however, he promised to see me, if he were not better in the morning.

Early that Monday morning Andy came, telling me the parson was very ill, and Miss Jessie begged me to come up.

I found that fever had set in. Mr. Carr was quite unconcious of everything around him.

At first I contended with the disease alone, but soon called in the neighbouring practitioners; we have done all we could, but he is sinking fast; there is little hope.

In cases of this kind I have long wished to try a remedy now used in fever hospitals, but which was unknown when I frequented them.

Even if I had at hand the proper appliances, I should shrink from making my first trial in the present instance. As a final resource, I have used my personal influence with Doctor Wyse, and just now received this telegram from him: "Leave by steamer to-night; have fast horses waiting."

We shall therefore have the advice of an experienced medical man, fully up in modern practice.

I have not told Jessie of his coming, neither shall I do so to-night; it would agitate her. She clings to the faintest hope, and, in my heart, I believe there is none.

Margaret and Janet are with the sick man to-night. He always appears calmer under Margaret's management. She is an excellent nurse; former experience with her mother has developed her natural gift that way. Only when Margaret is with him will Jessie leave her father, to take such short rest as is absolutely necessary.

Helen's helpfulness lies more outside the sick-room. She strives to keep the boys occupied, helping them to bear their trouble.

Poor lads! it is a sad ending to their Christmas holidays: the effect on Jack is very great; it seems to have completely sobered him. He hangs about the study, which opens from his father's bed-room, without his

boots, waiting to be sent on errands to the kitchen or elsewhere.

Alfred has quietly taken up such of his father's work as he can manage, carrying news of him to his sick parishioners, and to the children, whom he was accustomed to assemble after school hours, for brief religious instruction.

Doctor Helm has arranged for conducting the Church Services, and other necessary ministerial duty.

A great deal of Helen's time is taken up in answering inquiries made by people from various parts of the district, and of different religious denominations.

William Elton came down from Grastown, and remained the greater portion of last week here, arranging with Doctor Helm the Sunday work.

He has sent a telegram to Sydney, which will meet Edward on his arrival there; we expect him, therefore, almost daily. He is sure to leave business arrangements for the present, and come on at once, when he receives his brother's message. His presence would be a great comfort to us all. I see now how just are his views in respect to church management.

It is touching to hear our poor friend in his delirium betraying how heavily anxieties, which even Jessie thought he had thrown off, really pressed on him in secret.

I was standing by his bed one day, watching him as he moaned and tossed in a disturbed sleep. Presently he opened his eyes, and, fixing them on Margaret, put out his hand, as if to give her something.

"Put it away: do not let your mother see it just now," he said, in a low tone.

Margaret stooped towards him.

"Yes, it will be all right," she replied soothingly.

"No! no!" cried the sick man, in quite a loud voice, "it was not right. I should not have let her persuade

me to get it, poor dear, poor dear! it hurts her to see me shabby."

Jessie, who was kneeling on the other side, buried her face in the bed-clothes, sobbing softly. The movement disturbed him. He half rose, and whispered hurriedly,—

"We shall pay it by-and-by; I'll ask for time. Don't trouble your mother; she frets."

He evidently mistook Margaret for Jessie. It is strange how, throughout the delirium, his mind goes back to his wife, dead now so many years. He will speak to her of the children, bidding her not to be anxious about them.

On one occasion he fell asleep, with Margaret's hand in his, murmuring,—

"*He* feeds the sparrows; *He* will provide."

Jessie suffers acutely; indeed, all our hearts bleed to think of the load of anxiety our friend has borne silently and bravely so long.

The surgeon from Bulla, leaving the room with me, after one of his visits, said,—

"I attended Mrs. Carr; I always knew she fell a sacrifice to anxiety of mind, and want of the rest and change her health required; but I never suspected her husband had suffered so deeply."

Doctor Helm, who had come over with him, replied,—

"To my knowledge, Mr. Carr has never had the means of getting either rest or change for years—it was as much as he could do to educate his children. Now, if it would please God to raise him up, help enough would be forthcoming; the people have found out his value now they are going to lose him. To think that our Church should sacrifice her faithful servants in this manner!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

No hope.—"There will soon be an end."—Friends and no friends.—A gleam of consciousness.—The end.

Doctor Wyse has been here, and is gone again.

I did not tell Jessie of his coming until Andy had started for Bulla with the horses to meet him. I knew that even the short time that must then elapse before he could reach Lakeville would be a period of terrible suspense.

When she understood what I had done, she turned pale, and trembled with emotion, then, suddenly rising, she took my hand, "I know no one can do more than you do," she said, "yet I have *so* wished for this, I thought it impossible; indeed, indeed, I am grateful."

Alas! I could see she was hopeful too. I tried to hinder her from building on this new aid; indeed, I wanted to dissuade her from seeing Doctor Wyse, telling her the down steamer left at six that same evening, so he had but two hours to stay. However, I could not prevail, and when the time came for the doctor's arrival, I left her with Margaret, Helen accompanying me home to receive our friend.

"Give me credit for being good at need, Miss Helen," cried he, as he jumped from the buggy, then taking out his watch, "I have just one hour and forty minutes to stay, have the horses to the minute."

"Leave all that to me," I said, "we know at what sacrifice you have come. Andy has his orders."

We entered the house, and while he was hastily refreshing himself I gave the particulars of Mr. Carr's illness. He asked a few questions, approved of our treatment, and proposed that we should adjourn to the parsonage without delay.

The surgeon from Bulla had now joined us. Together we entered the sick-room.

Doctor Wyse's quick eye glanced round it. As he approached the patient, it rested on Jessie, then passed on to Margaret, whose hand he held a moment, whispering her to take Miss Carr away. There was a slightly interrogatory intonation as he pronounced her name, and he turned to me. I moved towards Jessie.

"This is Doctor Wyse, Miss Carr."

She put out her hand, saying simply,—

"Thank you for coming."

The tone touched him. Leading her gently to the door, he said,—

"Depend on our utmost skill. Try to rest, my dear." He did not see her again.

"I cannot meet that imploring look," he replied, when I suggested calling her before he left.

"How, then, can I?" was my heart's response; but I did not utter it. I knew we had occasioned inconvenience to our good friend—we need not add pain also. So he went away. His coming and going is like a dream; it leaves us with the pall of hopelessness lying the more heavily because of its momentary lifting.

After taking leave, he stooped forward to shake hands with me the second time.

"Bear up, South," said he; "bear up for her sake. Write to me when the end comes;" and he was off.

I watched the buggy out of sight, and lingered, listen-

ing to the horses' feet, dreading to meet the questioning gaze which I knew awaited me.

Helen came out and stole her hand into mine. A neighbour passed and inquired how the parson was going on.

Mechanically I answered his question, and suffered Helen to lead me in, taking the wine she poured out for me.

"Dear Fred, some one has come to help you through," she said. "I did not tell you while Doctor Wyse was here."

"Edward?" I exclaimed, with a wonderful sense of relief.

"Yes; he will be back directly."

"Where is he? When did he arrive?"

"Just after you and the doctors went to the parsonage. He has gone round to the hotel for a few minutes."

As she spoke Edward Elton entered the room. His warm clasp of my hand expressed pleasure, sorrow, support, and his salutation was in keeping with all three.

"How thankful I am to be here again, though it is indeed a sad home-coming! We must do all we can to help Jessie bear her great grief, and the poor lads too."

"You know how hopeless it is, then?" I said.

"I saw your face, doctor, as you walked down from the parsonage, that told me all."

"I hope it has told the others also. How can I speak it?"

"I will take that," Edward replied; "you have borne the brunt hitherto, I must take my share."

It was like Edward, always ready to accept the most difficult path for himself; yet, after all, I could not bear that Jessie should hear this from any lips but mine. I *must* be near her at such a moment.

"Helen and I will go down," I said, "and tell Margaret of your arrival. It would not do to take her by surprise, she has been a good deal overwrought lately."

"You did not tell me that, Helen!" he exclaimed.

"Of course she feels this, Edward; but Fred does not mean she is ill."

"Thank God!" he murmured, drawing a deep breath; "I think I might go down."

"No, no; I will bring her home, you must wait here, Edward."

"You won't be long," he entreated.

"I think we must leave Janet in charge of you, with strict orders not to let you out of her sight," cried Helen; "seriously, Fred is right; now you are come, Margaret will get out of the sick-room a little more, I hope."

"There will soon be an end of all that," said I gloomily.

"How long?" asked Edward, following to the door, "I must see him."

"A day or two at farthest."

As we went along, Helen suggested that it would be better to send Margaret to her to hear the news of Edward's arrival, while I made my sad report to Jessie. Afterwards I should take Margaret home, leaving Helen with Jessie, and bringing back Janet to remain the night at the parsonage, and relieve the nurse whom we had been obliged to hire.

I do not know how I told Jessie, I think she read the doom in my face; I only know we knelt together by the dying man, and I forgot myself and my love in striving to calm the daughter's anguish.

Alfred and Jack were hanging about the chamber door. Opening it, I motioned them to come in. "Look here, lads," I whispered, "you know what Jessie has been to you all your life, it is your turn now to comfort her, try

what you can do." I pointed to her grief-stricken figure, kneeling by the bed, and left the room, feeling that the orphan's agony should be sacred.

I found Margaret in a state of tearful excitement; her heart smote her for being glad in that house of mourning. We went hastily homeward; Edward, watching for us, met us half way, and took possession of Margaret.

I turned back to rejoin Helen.

Instinctively we paused on the threshold of the dying man's chamber, reluctant to intrude on its solemn quiet.

Mr. Carr lay in a sort of stupor. Jessie and Alfred sat by the bed, his arm round her, her head nestled on his shoulder. A low sob now and then shook her frame, like the soughing of the wind after a storm. It was the only sound that broke the stillness. Jack knelt by his sister, his head buried in her lap.

Presently the sick man moved, tossing his arms restlessly. Jessie bent over him; I got sight of her tear-stained face, quiet, yet quivering with emotion.

We came forward; after a while I prevailed on her to withdraw with Helen, and try to take some needful rest; solemnly assuring her that there was no danger of the end coming that night.

One question she asked,—

"Do you think he will be sensible?"

"In all probability, yes," I replied.

She brightened after that.

"Oh! if he would only speak to us once more like himself, I think I could bear it."

That faint relief in the hour of black despair offered something for hope to cling to.

I seized the opening to press on her the duty of endeavouring to recruit her exhausted energies, and recover self-command, in order that she might be able to take advantage of any gleams of returning consciousness.

"You are right," she said; "I will even take the anodyne; only once more promise to awaken me if, if—"

I interrupted her,—

"If there is any change you shall immediately be roused. Janet and I will watch. Trust me."

Later in the evening Edward and Margaret came down. The former decided to take up his quarters at the parsonage, and had his things brought up from the hotel. This was a great relief to me; I could now go about my necessary duties outside that house, in the confidence of knowing that Jessie had a strong helper always at hand. He declared his intention of sitting up that night, which I combatted, on the ground of his having been travelling for several nights previously. Edward, however, overruled that by asserting that he always slept better at sea than anywhere else. So we sent Janet home, keeping the watch ourselves.

Early next morning I went out to some distant patients. Returning, I found Doctor and Mrs. Helm at the parsonage, the latter had come to remain. Mr. and Mrs. Elton were at the Wells, in order to be at hand in extremity; but I had prohibited Mrs. Elton's visiting the parsonage, her own health being exceedingly delicate at that time. Mrs. Helm's presence was therefore doubly valuable. These have been always true friends. Many others have also shown real kindness from whom nothing was expected. Edward savagely remarked,—

"Friends are plentiful enough when they're of no use."

"Ay," replied Mrs. Helm; "a little of this interest shown in time, might have saved a valuable life."

"My dear," says the doctor, trying to be parsonic, "let us, at any rate, give them credit for present good feeling; we must submit patiently to God's will."

"Of course, James," replied Mrs. Helm, who feels

herself in a position to speak her mind on Church matters, and is always ready to stand up for the less favoured of her order; "Of course; but I don't believe it *is* God's will that the Church should never know how her clergy live until they sink under their unshared burdens."

"Mrs. Helm is quite right, doctor," said Edward; "if a few of our clergymen's wives would speak out, Church authorities might have their eyes opened a little."

"Very few are in a position to do so," Mrs. Helm remarked; "we are, in a measure, independent; I have no children to be anxious about; and I never allow myself to be bullied by parochial ladies, who have *views* as to what the parson should preach, and his wife practise."

The day wore on, bringing no change in the sick-chamber. Mrs. Helm took her place that night with Jessie, the doctor accompanying me home, and Edward promising to summon us if occasion arose.

The morning's report was, however, as usual; but my first glance at the patient told me change was at hand.

Soon he became restless, moaning from time to time, then lay quiet awhile. I stooped over him, and saw that his eyes were open; he looked round on us with a questioning gaze; presently memory awoke. Jessie was standing at his pillow, he made a motion to take her hand.

"How long have I been ill?" he whispered.

She told him.

"Fever?" he asked.

"Yes, father, dear; but you seem better."

"Hush, my child," he replied, almost sternly, and lay still a few minutes with closed eyes, holding her hand in his. Meantime I had prepared a drink, which I now brought to him. He took it eagerly.

"That is right," said he in a stronger voice; "now send for Doctor Helm and Mr. Elton."

"They are here, father."

"Let them come in; kiss me, darling, and go away."

As the clergyman's old friends entered the room, Jessie reluctantly left his side, and I led her out.

They have since told us that he expressed his wishes in respect to his children calmly and clearly, signed a short will, bequeathing to Jessie his interest in a small property which must fall to him on the death of a distant relation, and gratefully received the assurance of his friends that his children should be their care.

He then asked Doctor Helm to read the twenty-third Psalm, following him in a whisper, through a portion of it, but sinking into a lethargy before its close.

In the afternoon he roused a little, and asked for the boys. I administered a stimulant, then left him with his children.

When I returned to the room he had again dozed off.

Towards evening he became very restless; his mind wandered.

Several times he called his wife, and would talk to her about Jessie and the boys, as though they were still children.

Once he fixed his eyes on Jessie, and evidently knew her.

"I have been selfish, my darling," he moaned.

"Dearest father, you never had a thought of self."

"Nor of you," he muttered; "I counted you all as *myself*. I was wrong to sacrifice you."

"Nay," said Doctor Helm, coming forward, "you were right to be true to your profession; you bequeath your children an example of steadfastness in duty."

I don't think he heard; he went on talking to himself.

"I meant right. *He* knows; *He* will care for them." Then, making an effort to control his mind,—

"God bless my dear children!"

After that he was never conscious for more than a few minutes at a time.

Once he murmured,—

"Wait, Jessie, I am coming."

And once he motioned with his lips, and we caught the word "prayer."

A soft light came into his eyes as Doctor Helm repeated the commendatory prayer for the dying.

I had knelt with the rest; but, before he had concluded, rose softly to close the eyes from which the spirit's light had passed for ever.

I write this in the long dull weeks which have closed round us, now that the excitement of contending with disease and watching the stricken man is over.

How strange and desolate the shut-up parsonage looked! How we shrunk, at first, from seeing it reopened for strangers! but those feelings are passing away now, we are becoming accustomed to the new order of things.

Mrs. Helm remained with Jessie until the funeral was over, and was very anxious that she should return with her to Bulla; but Jessie chose her home with Mrs. Elton, to whom she can be useful, and we all felt that it would be better for her to be where she might find occupation which would interest her, and change the current of her thoughts. For the present, therefore, her home is at Grastown.

Alfred is going up for matriculation. Jack is with his sister. His father wished him to accompany Edward Elton when he returns to Guinnam, and to follow his natural inclination for station life.

So the children, who grew up together in Lakeville Parsonage, are to be scattered, and the gentle-hearted parson lies by the side of his long-mourned wife.

Margaret's marriage has of course been postponed, and

will not take place until Edward is on the eve of returning to Guinnam. Meantime, we interest ourselves in the progress of the house at the Wells, which is now almost finished. The furnishing and ornamentation will be left to Helen. Edward has given her *carte blanche* to indulge her own taste, and to gratify what she knows to be Margaret's.

This will afford her amusement and occupation when they are gone. She is under engagement to spend the month after the marriage at Grastown with Jessie.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Soporific!—"Quite the gentleman—on Sundays!"—Sweet folly!

The potato harvest has come and gone; the early autumn rains have set in.

I met the new parson and his wife the other day all but bogged in the forest.

They are young and full of energy, and are going to do great things in the parish. Edward sighs, and says it is sad to think how soon the spirit with which they have begun will be damped by petty annoyances, and their energy grow faint for lack of sympathy and encouragement.

I fancy he takes too gloomy a view of the future.

Mr. Veal is of the new order of clergy, and may push his way better than those who have grown up surrounded by the traditions and associations of the old country.

Our little excitable Methodist minister looks glumly prophetic, and talks about new brooms.

The farmers like Mr. Veal, and declare "there isn't a bit of pride in him nor in his missus;" that is to say, they take their opinion from their wives, who are usually the only occupants of the home during the day.

These ladies are already beginning to observe how often the parson's buggy is seen at So-and-So's door, and if not an equal number of times at their own, woe to the

unlucky parson, who is greeted next time he appears with,—

"I saw ye found time to call at Hobbs's t'other day, Mr. Veal. I thought ye'd have found time to call here, as we're regular at church, which is more than Hobbs can say; but my place *is* a *poor* place, no doubt, for the likes of ye to come to."

In vain he protests that it was getting dark, that his wife was weary, or that the Chief Shepherd Himself left the ninety-and-nine who were within the fold and went to seek the lost sheep. Each member of the congregation thinks that he, or *she*, is *the* parish, ignores the claims of others, and forgets that there is a limit to the parson's time and strength.

Still he makes way with the bulk of the people.

Our genteel storekeepers are, of course, entitled to be a little critical; also the postmaster and chemist's assistant. The chemist himself is a Gallio, and cares for none of these things; but his assistant—a smart young fellow from Melbourne—complains that Mr. Veal's sermons are "not suggestive enough for his taste."

Having occasion the other day to speak with the chemist about some new drugs I wanted him to get, I went with him into the inner room, where I usually write my prescriptions, leaving Edward, who was with me, in the shop.

The new parson passed the window. Edward remarked,—

"Mr. Veal seems quite at home in the parish already."

"He's well enough at speech-making, and good at visiting," replied the assistant superciliously; "but his public discourses, sir—really—you know—for any one with intellectual tastes—they are simply—soporific."

"I'm not intellectual, then," said Edward coldly, "for I listen to them, and profit by them too."

"Confound the fellow, with his absurd airs!" cried

Edward in a rage as we left the shop. "Here's a man expected to run about all the week, and preach intellectual discourses on Sundays."

Just then we encountered Margaret and Helen going into Maudsley's, the draper's. Edward joined them, and I went on. When we met at dinner, Helen had a good story to tell of poor Mrs. Maudsley's discomfiture.

She is a lady of pretension, has seen the world, worked in her young days with Madame, the great London milliner, and, as she assured Helen, "knows real gentlefolks when she sees them." This with a significant glance at Mrs. Veal, who was speaking to Margaret as she passed out of the shop.

Helen went on giving her orders, which, happening to be something about bonnets, drew from Mrs. Maudsley an indignant allusion to the clergyman's wife, who had been mean enough to request that some ribbons she had lying by might be put on to a bonnet she had just bought.

"But you know, Miss South," added the outraged milliner, "we've not got real gentry at the parsonage now. Mr. Carr might be poor, but he was always a gentleman, and Miss Carr, though she did do up her old hats herself, did it like a lady. 'Mrs. Maudsley,' she would say, 'you know papa is not rich, and I must make things go as far as I can; but when I *do* afford a new bonnet I order it of you;' and she did, Miss South—*always*. Oh! it would be a comfort to feel we had a real lady and gentleman at the parsonage again!'

"Just as Mrs. Maudsley said this," continued Helen, "Margaret and Edward came up. He burst out,—

"'Why, Mrs. Maudsley, it's not so long ago I heard you finding fault with Mr. Carr for educating his boys according to the custom of his family. Did you expect the bench of bishops to compete for the incumbency of Lakeville?'

"'Deed no, Mr. Edward; but a clergyman of the English Church, you know, should—'

"'Should be able to afford his wife a new ribbon? No doubt of that; but let me tell you, Mrs. Veal would be a lady without any ribbon at all. If the parson's not good enough, I should recommend you to try the neighbouring blacksmith, who, I am told, is a famous preacher, and quite the gentleman—*on Sundays.*'

"'I meant no offence, Mr. Edward. You always was bouncey about Mr. Carr, poor dear! as I remember. Good morning, miss!'

"That to me!" said Helen, mimicking the milliner's genteel manner.

"'I wish *you* a *very good* morning, Miss South,' to Margaret, in a tone of significant commiseration which plainly said,—

"'You see his temper. Poor young lady! I hope it will not be too much for you."

"And, indeed!" added Helen saucily, turning towards Edward, "I must say Mrs. Maudsley's sympathy may not be altogether uncalled for."

"Come, come, Helen, that's too bad!" cried Edward, laughing. "Confess, now, she was very provoking. Why, I saw you quite red with indignation."

The time draws on for our losing Margaret. Our second winter in Lakeville has commenced; it is rather late this year; we hope for a fine July, when Edward must return to his northern stations. The sixteenth is fixed for the wedding, and we are all busy preparing in various ways.

Edward and I have made several journeys to Bulla on business. He has behaved most handsomely, insisting on Margaret's interest in our father's little property being handed over to Helen, Margaret's settlements being ample and entirely secured to her. The more I see of Edward

the more confidence I feel in trusting my dear sister's future to him.

We went once to Grastown on family affairs. There I saw Jessie for the first time since she left her home. We only remained a few hours, but we almost succeeded in persuading her to come down for Margaret's wedding.

Mrs. Elton is not in good health, but she means to get to the Wells if the weather prove fine, and I think Jessie will accompany her.

Of course the marriage will be very quiet. None of us would have liked a great display on such an occasion. Did not the death of him, whom we all count a friend, still cast a shadow over our small circle?

It is time this record drew to a close. I have come down to present events; come, as I hope, very nearly to the end of the old life.

Is it possible that there can be a new life, even yet, before me? I thought I had passed the broad thoroughfares, and was ready to stand aside in the bye-paths, watching and helping, sorrowing and rejoicing with the younger travellers thereon. And yet with a heart soreness, a bitter sense of want, a feeling of having only *half*-lived, a natural, though unspoken longing for that crown of human existence—the life of the affections. Fraternal love, which wakened my soul after its long lethargy, for a while satisfied it. By-and-by Edward came, and I perceived that in Margaret's nature were depths and heights which neither Helen nor I had laid hold on.

In Helen they are yet silent, but some day the master-hand will touch those chords, and the responsive melody must be in proportion to the power and delicacy of her earnest spirit. Thinking on these mysteries, darkness brooded on my soul. How cold and poor and bare had been (would be) my life! I know now what was tugging at my heart, who was knocking at its door. The precise

how and *when* of the sweet guest's entrance I cannot recall. It came and nestled there, warming my whole being. I hid my eyes, and basked in its sunlight.

Presently it fluttered, restless and uneasy, demanding recognition. The veil lifted, and lo! sweet love enthroned therein! But *was* it sweet? I scarcely knew. Surely 'twas folly; surely 'twas hopeless; and yet such sweet hopelessness, such sweet folly! I would hug the agony and caress the madness rather than return to my former dead level of passionless reason.

So it went on until sorrow knocked at my loved one's door. I looked into her eyes, and saw she trusted me; I looked again and saw she clung to me. It was no time to gaze into her heart. If love lay there, it was in some secret corner, covered up and buried beneath the filial passion which agonized the daughter's soul. With that passion of grief, not quenched, but calmed, she lately knelt by her father's grave. I too knelt by her side.

Was it strange *there* to speak of living, hopeful love? It seemed to me a fitting time and place wherein to tell my tale.

And, as she listened with averted face, the tears fell softly.

And the soft hand I stole lay still in mine.

We rose and plighted troth.

Did not the father's spirit hover near and bless our love?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Wedding.—My fiftieth birthday.—Master Jack's epistle.

How selfish are lovers! I meant to have written of Margaret's wedding, which was a *fact* patent to everybody, and not to have betrayed my own love, which is a *secret*, sacred as yet to hope.

Now about the wedding. Janet says, "It went off fairly well considering it's the first. Maybe Miss Helen will improve with practice."

And Helen answers, "Do you think we shall, Fred?"

To which I reply, "Give us time, Nellie; don't try it on again too soon," whereupon she saucily shakes her head saying,—

"Give *us* time, Fred. Let us have at least a couple of months; we promise the cake shall outshine Margaret's. Won't it, Janet?"

"To be sure, miss. 'Twill be a grand day indeed that sees a Mrs. South come home to us!"

My heart gives a great big throb, but I bid them not talk nonsense, and walk off to my surgery.

So you see that, though we miss our merry darling, we are not inconsolable; her letters too keep us cheerful; she seems so happy.

Margaret left us on her marriage-day, which was one of those glorious sunshiny ones that brighten the Australian winter.

Doctor and Mrs. Helm came out the evening before. Mr. and Mrs. Elton, with Jessie, arrived the beginning of the week.

Jessie put off her mourning for a few hours in honour of the occasion.

"Papa would have wished it," she said; "he always loved Edward, and thought Margaret the only girl in the world good enough for him."

Two of Edward's old friends arrived from town; some of our mutual acquaintances also from Bulla. These, with Mr. and Mrs. Veal, made our party. Doctor Wyse could not come. He sent the bride a handsome reminder of his own and his wife's regard.

We regretted his absence the less on Jessie's account. Associations, connected with his presence, would have been very painful to her on this her first appearance among us since her father's death.

I hope, however, he will come by-and-by, when she will be better prepared to welcome him.

Dr. Helm performed the ceremony, assisted by Mr. Veal. Though we tried to keep the day secret, somehow it oozed out, as these things generally do.

Edward is too popular in Lakeville to escape demonstrations. Accordingly flags were flying, and a *feu-de-joie* was fired.

Great exertions had been made to obtain flowers, and the church was prettily decorated. Margaret's Sunday-school children strewed the path from the gate. In spite of these festive demonstrations, an air of subdued rejoicing prevailed on all sides, and many a "God bless you, Miss Jessie!" was mingled with cheers for the bride and bridegroom.

The occasion insensibly associated itself with the memory of the good parson who had lived among the Lakeville people so many years.

Dr. Helm, in proposing the health of the newly-married couple, alluded touchingly to his old friend, whose place he that day filled, adding that the mention of him should not awaken sorrowful thoughts, but rather a chastened tenderness not unsuitable to so sacred as well as happy an occasion.

Edward and Margaret set out on their journey to Melbourne directly after the breakfast. They had but four days in which to drive to town, make some final purchases, and go on board the steamer for Sydney. They occupied three on the journey, making it by easy stages. Mr. Elton and Jack Carr met them on the fourth day in Melbourne. Jack accompanied them to the station. He takes readily to station life, and already considers himself a connoisseur in sheep and cattle, writes long letters to Jessie about wool combed or uncombed, greasy or clean; mustering and branding of cattle, &c.: altogether, he seems to have fallen on his feet. A short time ago Edward had occasion to visit a distant part of the country. Jack went with him. As they met with some adventures, I shall insert a letter which Jessie has just received from him, and sent to us, knowing that we should be interested in Jack's description, which (he candidly tells her) in a short postscript, is mainly extracted from Edward's journal, to which he was allowed access, in order that he might convey to his sister a good idea of his first journey in the northern bush.

Margaret has written by the same mail, telling us that she passed the time of her husband's absence visiting some of his old friends in the neighbouring township, which is quite near Guinnam station; in fact, next door to it, being only seventy miles distant.

She seems to enjoy the free life and fine climate of this new northern land; yet every letter tells how both she and Edward anticipate their return to us early next year.

That year, which, I hope, will bring to me also a new life, even though it will see me complete my fiftieth birthday!

Half a century behind, how much before? Who can say? Whether it be long or short, it shall at least be devoted to trying to make the happiness of my sweet young wife, for young she is to me, although no longer a girl.

After Edward and Margaret left, Mrs. Elton and Jessie stayed at the Wells, while Mr. Elton took Jack Carr to meet Edward in Melbourne, and remained until the steamer sailed.

It was during those days that I took Jessie to visit her father's grave.

The cemetery is some distance beyond Lakeville; several miles from the Wells. It was therefore arranged that she should stay with Helen a little while; and that I should drive her down, leaving her at the cemetery while visiting a patient near.

I did not visit my patient though, after putting Jessie down, I drove on in his direction; wanting time to make up my mind whether I should that day venture to cross the rubicon of my fate.

I resolved to do so; with what happy results I have already hinted.

Jessie has not been to see us since; but I am to take Helen to stay with her at Grastown next week, when we shall return Master Jack's epistle.

With it I end this record of my old life!

"Dear Jessie,—As I want to write you a full account of my first bush journey, Mr. Edward has lent me the rough notes from which he writes his journal every evening for Miss Margaret, I mean Mrs. Elton, to read when we get back. (I am quite used to calling her by her new name now; it's only in writing to you I make a

mistake.) Well, we went northward, towards a big river; but we never got quite up to the river. (I shall try that some day, when I have a station of my own.) We had two blackfellows with us, belonging to Guinnam Run; every night we camped out. Jolly fun it was, I can tell you, when the weather was dry.

"Our provisions were carried by a pack-horse; flour, tea, sugar, and salt meat, with a little brandy, in case of sickness, also blankets and 'possum-rugs, three pannikins, and a billy.

"Mr. Elton had a rifle, and I a fowling-piece; one of the blacks had a gun. We often shot a wild pigeon or duck, which was an improvement on the salt meat; it was odd, though, about the blacks; whether we had wild fowl or game, they always wanted their allowance of salt junk all the same.

"'Possums were plentiful, seldom a day passed that we did not catch some. The blacks would cook them at the next camping-place; but I used to look after my own share and Mr. Elton's, because the natives eat them half cooked. The way they cook is very little trouble, certainly; but I don't expect you'll follow it when I tell you how they manage. I must say, I like our way best, though it is more trouble. Our blacks are Bobby and Dick.

"One day Dick caught a 'possum, and carried it to the evening camp. He lit two fires, one for us, the other for himself and Bobby. Bobby unsaddled the horses; gave them a drink and some maize, then hobbled them, and let them go.

"I watched Dick with his 'possum. So soon as ever the fire burnt up, he threw it, skin and all, on to the blazing sticks, turned it over two or three times, took it out, and rubbed the fur off with his hands.

"That was all the cleaning it got, when I asked him

wasn't he going to take out the inside, he laughed at me, saying that was 'too good.' Then he waited till the fire was burned down a little, and when there were some red-hot embers, he put the 'possum on them, turned it pretty often, and in about ten minutes it was ready. Another ten minutes, and Bobby had helped him to devour it; both of them thoroughly enjoying this preparation for the salt pork we served out to them. Mr. Elton says he doesn't understand the cookery-book, and I'm sure I don't; but we've invented a better way of cooking our salt meat; we don't care for 'possums. While the billy is boiling for tea, we make two horizontal cuts at the bark of a tree, about half a yard apart. Then, pushing the hatchet under the bark, we get off a square piece. This is our cooking-board. We put two pannikins of flour on it, and some water to make a paste, about half an inch thick. Meantime, Dick makes us a splendid fire of clear, hot embers, and the leather jackets (that's what we call this sort of damper) are placed on it. I cut some sticks, about half a yard long, split at one end. We put our salt meat into the split part, and fix the sticks into the ground near the fire, leaning rather over it, this makes a capital gridiron, and cooks the *meat* very well; as for the leather jackets—well, the name isn't a bad one, but living on horseback in the fresh air furnishes an appetite and digestion to which few things come amiss.

"After supper we generally make some damper for next morning. Damper and leather jackets are pretty much alike; only for the former we use more flour, and spread out the paste into flat cakes, as big as a dinner-plate, and it takes longer to cook.

"We cooked it usually the last thing at night, when the fire had been burning some time, and there was a good bed of ashes. You put the damper between two layers

of these, and it takes a little over half an hour to cook. While I am telling you about our cooking, I will say something about the wonderful appetite our blacks have. One day Bobby shot a kangaroo, and slung it across the led horse, till we got to our night's camping-ground. Mr. Elton cut off a good steak from it; enough for himself and me, we cooked it—pork fashion—ourselves, leaving all the rest for Bobby and Dick, who cooked it their own way. I do believe they must have sat up all night eating, for, when we awoke in the morning, only one fore-quarter of the kangaroo remained, and they had eaten their pork and damper as usual. The kangaroo made a sort of dessert for them, I suppose. There they were, sound asleep, by the side of the forelorn fore-leg. We calculated they must have consumed thirty pounds of meat between them.

"Mr. Elton says the blacks are wonderfully enduring in the opposite direction, and can bear great privation.

"When they get very hungry they 'take in a reef,' that is to say, they tighten the belt round their waist, compressing the stomach a good deal. This deadens the feeling of hunger. After a three days' fast, a blackfellow will exhibit no remarkable distress, but he will show a finely attenuated waist,—very different, I guess, from Bobby's and Dick's next morning after the kangaroo feast.

"We passed through some beautiful country during this journey, especially as we approached the river. Mr. Elton was for ever wishing Doctor South could see it, you know he is crazy about scenery. I thought it was fine too, but (as Mr. Elton said) the doctor would have seen beauties which were lost to us. I must describe one place we came to.

"We had fallen in with some natives just before, and we got one of them to show us a near cut across the country. He was called George; he led the way on foot, as we had

no spare horse. For nearly four hours we followed him, descending gradually from the table-land on which we had been travelling, along a ridge, with a ravine on either side, across which there was another ridge higher than the one we were on.

"Presently we got a peep of lowlands, through a gap in the enclosing ridges, and immediately George cried out that we were wrong.

"Mr. Elton asked him what he meant. He said he had made a mistake, that we could not get through that way, but must go on to the higher ridge on our right.

"It is so unusual for a native to make a mistake of this kind, that Mr. Elton did not believe him, but thought he must have some secret motive for not wishing to go forward. We considered it over, but could not hit on any, nor could we get anything more from George. He insisted that we should not be able to reach the low river-land that way; that he had turned on to the wrong ridge. Yet there were the lowlands lying just before us in sight, with a visible gap in the mountains leading straight on to them. We thought perhaps George's instinct had made him aware of the vicinity of some hostile tribe, or that for some reason of his own he had fabricated the story of having missed the right road.

"Mr. Elton determined therefore to go straight on, the track looking more and more promising, apparently leading us direct to our destination.

"As evening set in we came on to a lovely little camping-place, completely shut in by hills, that which we had just descended behind, a lower one in front; on both sides the lofty ridges that had all along hedged up our path like a wall on either hand.

"We had for some time heard the gurgling of water; now on our left lay the sparkling streamlet, easily accessible, gushing forth and rushing rapidly forward to those

beautiful lowlands we had seen through the gap, soft and green, set in their frame of hills.

"'This,' said Mr. Elton, 'must be the veritable happy valley; let us remain in it to-night at least.'

"I jumped from my horse, and lighted on a spongy sward, almost approaching to a swamp.

"'Halloa!' cried Mr. Elton, 'this won't do; let us go on to those shea-oaks, that will be a splendid camping-ground.'

"We kindled our fire there, and prepared supper as usual. While the blacks were at this, Mr. Elton commenced chopping down some of the smaller branches of the shea-oak trees, and called me to do the same. I couldn't make out what he was going to do with them, but I soon saw when he broke off the little branchlets, and, carrying them near the fire, began to spread them on the ground, the thick ends all pointing in one direction. Then we placed another layer of branches over these sticks, and soon layer after layer, until a piece of ground, large enough to lie upon, was thatched about a foot deep.

"We put our blankets on this, so making a most comfortable bed, soft and springy, and sufficiently above the swampy ground to prevent the damp affecting us.

"'There's a wrinkle for you, Jack,' said Mr. Elton; 'that may serve again, when you find yourself obliged to camp in a swamp.'

"We had a capital sleep. In the morning George was nowhere to be found. This only confirmed our impression that he had some private reason for not wanting to pursue that road. However, seeing the way before us, we didn't trouble about his departure.

"Making an early start, we ascended the gradual slope of the grassy hill in front, speculating occasionally on George's motives for forsaking us. An hour's ride explained all. Suddenly the high ridge on our right swept

round and joined that on our left, leaving us shut in by an impassable barrier.

"'George knew what he was about, after all,' said Mr. Elton; 'a wilful man will have his way. We've had ours; and clearly there's nothing for it but to go back and follow George's advice; however, as we are never likely to be here again, let us have a good look at the place.'

"We dismounted, and walked to the edge of the ridge. What a scene it was! I wish I could describe it properly, but I can't; I kept wishing I was a painter.

"How grand a picture like this would look in the Melbourne Library!

"We stood on the edge of a precipice, from eight hundred to a thousand feet sheer down. On our left was the high ridge which had hedged us in so many hours; at its base a full clear stream rushed noisily over huge boulders, which obstructed its course, tossing the tiny waves into sprays of foam that danced and glittered in the sunlight. Immediately beneath us the watercourse by which we had camped joined the other; together they swept through the gap that so provokingly showed the lowlands to which we were journeying, yet effectually cut us off from them. Mr. Elton said there would be a splendid waterfall in that gap, but we could not get near enough to see it. The streamlet seemed to fill the entire width of the gap, the opposing faces of the hills on each side rose perpendicularly to a height of fully twelve hundred feet, having the appearance of not being more than a bow-shot across at the top, towering high above the spot on which we were standing.

"Through these rocky gates we caught a glimpse of soft swelling hills and undulating stretches of meadow-land of a most lovely green.

"Mr. Elton seemed as if he couldn't get away from the place.

"'Oh, for the painter's power!' he cried; 'but an exact reproduction of this scene would strike eyes accustomed to the sombre hues of northern climates as an exaggeration; any way, Jack, we are favoured to have looked on it. How few human eyes—at least of civilized man—can have gazed on this! *He* sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. How manifold are *Thy* works, O God! in wisdom hast Thou made them all.'

"Mr. Elton was talking to himself. He took off his hat; so did I. Something reminded me of dear father and the night we were all walking on the hill-side at Lakeville, watching the fires. Oh, Jessie, it does seem so long ago! What a lot of things have happened since! To think that we shall never see him again!

"I was thinking like this, when Mr. Elton touched me.

"'Come Jack,' said he, 'we have lingered here so long that we shan't get farther back than last night's camping-ground before dark.'

"Slowly we returned to our horses, and found Bobby and Dick happily engaged in feasting on a snake, which they had killed during our absence.

"We retraced our steps; but before we got to the swampy camping-ground black clouds gathered in the sky, rolling up behind the hills, and hanging low down on the rocky guardians of the gap.

"We made haste to get together a quantity of dry wood, and to make a large fire, which the rain could not quite put out. Down it came in great big drops, flooding the ground all round us. Luckily we had secured our saddles and baggage among the boughs of some large trees, and covered them with cut branches.

"The lightning came flash after flash, almost blinding us; the thunder roared, echoing and re-echoing among the hills, so that it never appeared to cease; but kept up

one continuous roar, now swelling near, now dying away in the distance.

"The storm lasted nearly an hour; then the sun shone out for a few minutes before it finally disappeared behind the ridge above us, whence its rays were reflected on the glittering leaves, still wet from the storm.

"Protruding masses of rock improvised miniature waterfalls, which would leap up brightly in the slanting light, then dash into the abyss, already lying in evening shadow.

"Mr. Elton and I were wet to the skin, and had to fall in with the fashion of our black companions—take off our clothes and go without any while they hung on sticks to dry before the enormous fire we had made. Our beds also had to be dried: fresh branches would have been no better than the ones we had, because the trees were equally wet.

"It was quite dark before we got things snug and our clothes on again. Although the ground was saturated, we slept well on our shea-oak mattrasses, and felt no ill effects in the morning from the wetting we had got the previous night.

"We travelled back along our old route until we reached to the right-hand ridge. Getting on to that, we followed it till we came nearly to the point where it slopes down to the other ridge. The scene of the day before again lay before us, only now, from a slightly higher point of view, displaying more of the lowlands beyond the gap, which we found magnificently timbered, like a fine park, many miles in extent.

"'Is this an enchanted land?' asked Mr. Elton; 'I don't see even now how we are to get into it.'

"The blacks suggested a rugged path, apparently turning back from it, which we found wound along southward, in a zig-zag direction, extremely rough and troublesome for horses.

"It went along a line of hills, descending abruptly on either side. These hills reminded me of the houses you used to build for us of cards, when we were little fellows. They lay against each other, just like the two cards which formed our basement story, the union of the two representing the narrow ridge, on which we journeyed for perhaps a couple of miles; then it began to grow softer in outline, gradually descending from the edge of the gap, melting at last into an easy slope, along which we rode comfortably into the enchanted land.

"While passing this ridge Bobby killed a snake, in a very smart fashion. He was walking at the time, and watching intently a group of native bees, which were flying about in the air. Unawares he trod on a large snake; instantly he bounded into the air, doubling his feet under him, until he looked like a great black ball. In this position he struck downwards with a stick he had in his hand, and killed, or at least disabled the snake.

"This was the last of our adventures. We camped one night at the entrance of the lowlands, and the following day reached our destination, a large Run on the Upper River, on which some celebrated cattle were for sale. Mr. Elton bought a mob of these. Three days after we started again, driving them to Guinnam station.

"We arrived safely last week, returning by the older road, which, though farther round, is of course more suitable for driving cattle."

THE END.

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